

“OUR PEOPLE SCATTERED:” VIOLENCE, CAPTIVITY, AND COLONIALISM ON
THE NORTHWEST COAST, 1774-1846

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: “Our People Scattered:” Violence, Captivity, and Colonialism on the Northwest Coast, 1774-1846”

This thesis interrogates the practice, economy, and sociopolitics of slavery and captivity among Indigenous peoples and Euro-American colonizers on the Northwest Coast of North America from 1774-1846. Through the use of secondary and primary source materials, including the private journals of fur traders, oral histories, and anthropological analyses, this project has found that with the advent of the maritime fur trade and its subsequent evolution into a land-based fur trading economy, prolonged interactions between Euro-American agents and Indigenous peoples fundamentally altered the economy and practice of Native slavery on the Northwest Coast. Furthermore, Euro-American forms of captivity (including hostage-taking and unfree labor) intersected with the Native slave economy in distinctive and fascinating ways. Finally, this study observes that the Indigenous economic, sociopolitical, and demographic landscape of the Northwest Coast underwent various transformations in which captivity in its myriad forms assumed a central role.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. SOFT GOLD AND SLAVERY: CONTACT, CAPTIVITY, AND VIOLENCE IN THE MARITIME FUR TRADE	
a. Introduction.....	10
b. An Overview of Northwest Coast Slavery.....	13
c. Captivity and Encounter in the Maritime Fur Trade.....	18
d. Conclusion.....	41
III. BURNT FORTS AND BLOODY BAIDARKAS: POLITICS, PROFIT, AND CAPTIVES IN ALASKA AT THE TURN OF THE 19 TH CENTURY	
a. Introduction.....	43
b. Early Encounters, Captives, and the Creation of “Russian America”.....	46
c. The Battles of Sitka: Conflict and Captivity.....	59
d. Conclusion.....	75
IV. EXTINCTION AND EXPANSION: RAIDERS, CAPTIVES, AND THE RISE OF THE HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY IN A CHANGING INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE	
a. Introduction.....	78
b. Salish Sea Slave-raiding and the Battle of Maple Bay.....	82
c. Fort Simpson and Slavery on the North Coast.....	99
d. Conclusion.....	108
V. CONCLUSION.....	111

Chapter	Page
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REFERENCES CITED

a. Primary Sources.....	116
b. Secondary Sources.....	119

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Agnes Alfred circa 1975.....	1
2. John R. Jewitt circa 1820.....	10
3. Kwakwaka'wakw "Slave Killer" war club.....	13
4. Depiction of a sea otter (<i>Enhydra lutris</i>) c. the late-eighteenth century.....	18
5. The short-lived Spanish settlement of Santa Cruz de Nutka.....	31
6. Photograph of the Raven Helmet worn by K'alyaan.....	43
7. Russian map of the North Pacific and American possessions.....	46
8. RAC fort of Novo Arkhangelsk circa 1805.....	59
9. An Artistic rendition of the 1804 Battle of Sitka.....	62
10. K'alyaan and his wife c. 1818.....	75
11. Frank Allen and his wife Lucy c. 1930.....	78
12. Songhee war party returning to Fort Victoria after a successful raid c. 1847.....	87
13. Maple Bay (<i>Hwtl'upnets</i>), British Columbia, in 2018.....	93
14. Tsimshian potlatch in the late-nineteenth century.....	105
15. Map of Oregon Country.....	108
16. Peace dance held at a Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch circa 1983.....	111

I. INTRODUCTION



Agnes Alfred circa 1975.¹

From 1979 to 1985, Agnes Alfred, a Qwiqwasutinuxw noblewoman of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation in British Columbia, engaged in a series of interviews conducted by anthropologist Martine J. Reid and Daisy Sewid-Smith, Alfred's granddaughter. Born in the late-nineteenth century, Alfred delivered to her interviewers a veritable wellspring of knowledge regarding her people's history and culture, knowledge which captured centuries of change and endurance. Among Alfred's recollections were highly detailed accounts of violence and captivity, elements that proved critical in the history of both the Kwakwaka'wakw and of the Indigenous Pacific Northwest Coast as a

¹ Ulli Steltzer, *Agnes Alfred, from Mamalelekala Tribe, Village Island, now Alert Bay*, ca. 1975, http://collection.legacy.uvic.ca/index.php?id=11440&artifact_action=info.

whole. One incident described by Alfred in particular stands out for its sheer brutality. Sometime between 1856 and 1860, Alfred's grandmother (among other relatives) paid witness to a raid which devastated the Qwiqwasutinuxw village of Gwayasdums near the northern edge of present-day Vancouver Island. The raid, which was carried out by a Nuxalk (Bella Coola) party who had originally arrived to Gwayasdums to trade, represented the last and perhaps most devastating episode in a long series of conflicts between the two groups. According to Alfred, the Nuxalk attack was precipitated by an incident in which Alfred's aunt, then a young girl, stole a Nuxalk *hamatsa* whistle. The following morning, the Nuxalk party attacked Gwayasdums at dawn, killing and taking captive most of the village's inhabitants. In one of her many interviews, Alfred related the following grim scene: "There were headless bodies everywhere, lying on the beach. They said that all of [Gwayasdums] was red with blood at high tide. My mother told me that their bodies looked like those of fish after they had been cut; they had shrunk." Many of those who survived were taken as slaves by the attacking party, including one of Alfred's aunts, and Alfred's grandmother, Maxwalogwa, was later ransomed by Kwakiutl relatives. For the Qwiqwasutinux, the Nuxalk raid at Gwayasdums represented a pivotal moment in their people's long history. According to Alfred, "our people [the Qwiqwasutinuxw] scattered," further noting that the raid's few survivors dispersed among other nearby villages in which they had relations, creating a diaspora which introduced severe disruptions to Qwiqwasutinuxw lifeways.²

² Agnes Alfred, "ʔAḵw's Version of the War between the Qʷiqʷasutinuxʷ and the Bella Coola," in *Paddling to Where I Stand: Agnes Alfred, Qʷiqʷasutinuxʷ Noblewoman*, ed. Martine J. Reid, trans. Daisy Sewid-Smith (Vancouver & Toronto: UBC Press, 2004), 57-63.

The 1856-60 Nuxalk raid at Gwayasdums, far from being an isolated incident, was emblematic of broader changes and disruptions occurring throughout the Indigenous worlds of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beginning with the first Spanish voyages in 1774, the native peoples of the Northwest Coast were drawn into a complex of interactions with European and Anglo-American agents, initiating the spread of the differing forms of colonialism which have characterized the region to this day. As Spanish, British, Russian, and American traders and explorers began their scramble for the valuable resources of the American North Pacific with ever-greater intensity, Indigenous economic, political, and social landscapes changed in ways that would eventually abet the colonizers. Furthermore, violence, captivity, and the institution of slavery, all of which were central features of the Northwest Coast human landscape in pre-European times, shifted dramatically with increased exposure to the material and political consequences of non-Native colonialism. Indeed, the attack at Gwayasdums and its consequences as described by Alfred occurred at a point by which the changes produced by colonialism had both cemented themselves on the Northwest Coast and wrought devastating ramifications for the region's Indigenous people.

This work examines the violent changes introduced to the Indigenous worlds of the Northwest Coast with a focus on Indigenous and non-Indigenous captivities from 1774 to the Anglo-American Oregon Boundary Agreement of 1846. Such captivities included the Indigenous institution of slavery and captive-taking through warfare as well as the Euro-American practices of hostage-taking, unfree labor, and participation in Indigenous slaving economies, elements which converged under the colonial context of

the post-contact Northwest Coast. With the late-eighteenth century advent of European-American colonialism in the maritime fur trade, non-Indigenous economic and political influences came to fundamentally alter Native practices and political economies on the Northwest Coast. Central to these alterations were the pre-existing Indigenous institution of slavery and captivity-related practices. Northwest Coast slavery, distinctive among related institutions in Native North America as a whole in its hereditary nature, experienced consequential shifts throughout the fur trade era, triggering violent processes which reshaped the fabric of the region. These recalibrations will be observed over the course of three chapters organized along chronological, thematic, and geographical lines, covering Indigenous societies from Puget Sound to Alaska (roughly corresponding to the Northwest Coast Inside Passage)³ from the late-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Though these parameters do not cover the entire Northwest Coast in its sheer scale and complexity, they are intended to provide in-depth analyses of specific aspects of captivity during the fur trade era as they developed under different colonial and economic circumstances.

This project additionally seeks to address gaps and discontinuities in the relevant literature on Northwest Coast slavery and captivity. Though many scholarly works (predominately anthropological) have addressed slavery and captivity on the Northwest Coast, most notably Leland Donald's *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*,⁴ relatively few works of *history* have examined these subjects in any

³ The "Inside Passage" of the Northwest Coast refers to the collection of sheltered marine waterways stretching from Puget Sound in the south to Alaska's Alexander Archipelago in the north.

⁴ Leland Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997).

substantial capacity. Numerous works of historical literature have analyzed the Northwest Coast and its Indigenous societies, most notably Robin Fisher's *Contact and Conflict* and Joshua Reid's *The Sea is my Country*.⁵ Despite the seeming importance of slavery in the Indigenous Northwest Coast social order, however, such relevant historical works have generally acknowledged the presence of slavery on the Northwest Coast without addressing it thoroughly or including it as a fundamental part of their analyses.

Conversely, works of anthropology such as *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America* generally fail to situate Indigenous slavery in a broader historical context and to examine the myriad changes the institution underwent as a result of Euro-American colonization substantively, preferring to approach the subject heuristically and in a way that renders it static. Furthermore, such anthropological works do not sufficiently acknowledge the dynamism of Northwest Coast slavery and captivity in the face of profound historical change. This study will attempt to provide an overview of these elements and situate them within the broader historical context of colonialism in North America and the Pacific, utilizing relevant literature to piece together a more complete and coherent picture of Northwest Coast slavery and captivity in relation to the Euro-American colonization of the Western Hemisphere and its repercussions. Particular emphasis is placed on the dynamism and fluidity of Northwest Coast slavery and captivity, observing the ways in which these factors intersected with a broad range of material and sociopolitical changes to produce a transformed Indigenous landscape in

⁵ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977); Joshua Reid, *The Sea is my Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015).

which pre-colonial social patterns were exacerbated in response to colonial pressures. Such an approach is thus necessary to analyze Northwest Coast slavery and captivity not only as features of the region's Indigenous societies, but as important historical forces in their own right.

Chapter one analyzes the early years of the maritime fur trade from initial Spanish explorations in 1774 to the first decade of the nineteenth century with a focus on outer coast peoples such as the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. This period was marked by rapid changes to Indigenous trading patterns and material life. The rise of the maritime fur trade, buoyed by Euro-American demand for sea otter pelts, witnessed new violent interactions both between rival Indigenous groups and between Native people and Euro-American agents, interactions in which captivity played a central role in a destabilized landscape. Chapter two shifts the geographical parameters of analysis further north to the present-day US state of Alaska. This region saw a concerted effort at colonization by the Russian Empire, whose tactics differed substantially from other Euro-American players on the Northwest Coast, spurring subsequent interactions distinct to the area. Russian attempts to secure political control over Alaska's Indigenous inhabitants and to exploit the region's sea otter population through the enforcement of captive labor practices on Indigenous bodies brought the Empire's agents into direct conflict with Tlingits in the Alexander Archipelago of southeast Alaska. Indeed, the 1802 and 1804 Battles of Sitka and their repercussions represented some of the most dramatic events of the fur trade era. Central to the build-up, eruption, and aftermath of the conflict were Indigenous and Euro-American captivities, and the early successes of the Tlingit resistors arguably crippled the Russian colonization effort, a development which had immense repercussions for the

Northwest Coast as a whole in that Russia's weakened position delivered an upper hand to other colonial powers.

The third, and final chapter, examines the changes wrought upon Indigenous sociopolitics, slavery, and warfare initiated by the shift from the maritime fur trade to a new land-based regional economy from around 1810 to 1846. With the decline of sea otter populations, the erosion of American dominance in the trade, and the concurrent rise of the British Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) on the Northwest Coast, a new trade centered on permanent forts emerged, shifting the geographical focus of the fur trade economy from the outer coast to the area's sheltered waterways and rivers, particularly in what would become British Columbia. This shift gave rise to newly specialized Indigenous middleman communities such as the Coast Tsimshian and triggered changes both to the regional slave trade and the social economy of Indigenous slavery itself. This same period saw a concurrent rise in violence and slaving activities resulting from the dramatic southward expansion of the Lekwiltoks, a group constituting the southernmost branch of the Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwaka'la-speaking) people. This expansion, arguably unique in the post-contact history of the Northwest Coast, resulted in mass dislocation and depopulation among the Coast Salish peoples of the Salish Sea region and was tied to the growing profitability of slaving activities resulting from the land-based fur trade and the material consequences of trade with Euro-Americans. The violence emergent from Lekwiltok expansion reached a dramatic climax in the 1830s Battle of Maple Bay, a confrontation in which an unprecedented Coast Salish military alliance exacted revenge on the Lekwiltok near present-day Vancouver Island. This chapter will additionally analyze the emergence of a vast slaving network on the northern Northwest Coast

centering on the HBC post of Fort Simpson. More than any other Euro-American trading port on the coast, Fort Simpson fundamentally reorganized its surrounding economic networks, a metamorphosis of which slavery was a critical component. Both Lekwiltok expansion in the Salish Sea and the emergence of Fort Simpson as a nexus of a regional slaving economy were direct consequences of material conditions emerging from Euro-American colonialism in the fur trade, and the changes manifest in these developments ultimately enriched the colonizers and paved the way for the eventual settler-colonization of the Northwest Coast in the late-nineteenth century through the creation of vital wealth and infrastructure.

Beginning with the 1846 Anglo-American Oregon Boundary Agreement, which saw nominal political control of much of Northwestern North America split between Britain and the United States along the forty-ninth parallel, Euro-American settler-colonialism emerged on the Northwest Coast, eventually coming to supplant the colonialism of the fur trade. It was in this period that Agnes Alfred's ancestors lived and endured through the Nuxalk attack at Gwayasdums as white settlers began streaming into Indigenous lands. The attack described by Alfred not only took place in and was the result of a violent context emergent from Euro-American colonialism via the fur trade but is further symbolic of the changes this work examines. Slavery, captivity, and violence, elements which were integral parts of pre-colonial Northwest Coast Indigenous societies, were altered in new and profound ways by the fur trade. In both the maritime and land-based phases of the trade, Euro-American influences and new economies transformed Indigenous societies and inter-Indigenous interactions, changes at which violence and captivity were at the heart of the matter. Furthermore, the successes and failures of the fur

trade colonial project were tied inextricably to these changes, developments which later translated themselves onto Euro-American settler colonialism in the region. As such, the fur trade and its accompanying violence represented a critical moment in the histories of the Northwest Coast's Indigenous peoples and of the region as a whole.

II. SOFT GOLD AND SLAVERY: CONTACT, CAPTIVITY, AND VIOLENCE IN THE MARITIME FUR TRADE

Introduction



John R. Jewitt.⁶

From 1803-5, John R. Jewitt, an English-born armorer and participant in the burgeoning maritime fur trade, lived as a slave of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth (Nootka) titleholder Maquinna. In retribution for a series of Euro-American insults and misdeeds, Maquinna launched a deadly attack on the American brig *Boston*, burning the vessel, stripping it of its valuables, and killing all on board save two captives. Among those those taken captive was Jewitt, whose skill in the maintenance and repair of firearms was

⁶ *John R. Jewitt, from a watercolor*, ca. 1820, Archives visual records collection, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives.

perceived by Maquinna as invaluable. Sometime during his captivity, Jewitt participated in a successful raid against a village of Maquinna's rivals, the "A-y-charts," in which he was permitted to take four people as slaves to "consider as mine." Jewitt's now famous captivity narrative, though colored by ethnocentric perceptions of Native people, provides an invaluable vignette of Indigenous captivities and the influence of the maritime fur trade on the social, political, and economic landscape of the Northwest Coast. This vignette, however, portrays only fragments of an immeasurably complex web of violent interactions in which captivity was central. In order to capture such complexities, this chapter will proceed to analyze the captivities which characterized the Northwest Coast in two major parts. Part one will provide an overview of Northwest Coast Indigenous slavery as an institution and practice at the time of contact and explain its fundamental features. The antiquity of Northwest Coast slavery is well attested to in both anthropological literature and ethnohistories, and the institution was remarkable among broader Indigenous captivities in North America in that it was an inheritable status marked by drastic natal alienation. Furthermore, Indigenous slavery often structured further acts of violence and captivity arising from the maritime fur trade. Part two examines slavery and captivity in the maritime fur trade period, beginning with first encounters between Euro-Americans and Native people in the late-eighteenth century into the first decade of the nineteenth century. This section will proceed thematically, examining multiple aspects of captivity and violence on the Northwest Coast ranging from "displaced violence" emerging from the maritime fur trade, the practice of hostage-taking, and Euro-American involvement in the Indigenous slave system in the purchase (or "redemption") of enslaved people and in an emerging economy of sexual slavery. Part

two will further analyze the effects these factors had on Indigenous communities, whether economic dislocation, war, or demographic catastrophe.

This chapter likewise has a geographic component. Given the circumstances of the maritime fur trade, its transient nature, and the geography of the Northwest Coast, much of the activity during this era was focused on communities resident in the outer coast. Groups such as the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Haida, and Sitka Tlingit became key players in the new maritime fur trade economy owing to their position on the Pacific Ocean allowing for easy access for trading vessels. Under these circumstances, individual titleholders such as Maquinna and Wickaninnish were able to monopolize trade within their respective regions, building networks of political and economic dominance through violent processes in which raiding and the taking of captives featured prominently. Though the rise to power of such Indigenous leaders was relatively brief given the decline of sea otter populations by the early-nineteenth century, the regional implications of these political and economic shifts were critical to future developments on the Northwest Coast. The circumstances generated by Euro-American-Indigenous interactions and colonial influence produced complex and varied waves of violence which altered Indigenous life, enriched Euro-American players, and ultimately created power vacuums which colonizers would later fill in the nineteenth century. Bound up in all of these changes were multiple forms of captivity, an underlying current which created a fluid and volatile landscape.

An Overview of Northwest Coast Slavery



Kwakwaka'wakw "Slave Killer" war club. This designation comes from the use of such implements in the ritual killing of slaves during pre- and post-contact times.⁷

The Northwest Coast of North America was among the last regions in the Western Hemisphere to experience colonial penetration given its remote geography and then-weak Euro-American interest in the North Pacific. When the first European expeditions arrived at the Northwest Coast, they encountered highly sophisticated and well-established "complex hunter-gatherer" Indigenous societies. Such societies, in contrast to western conceptions regarding the linear development of civilization, were characterized by strong social stratification manifest in regimes of hereditary rank that existed alongside marine-oriented hunter-gatherer economies. These ranking systems in large part consisted of three clearly distinguished groups: a "class" of wealthy and

⁷ *Slave Killer Club*, ca. mid-nineteenth century, Arts of the Americas, Brooklyn Museum.

ceremonially powerful titleholders at the top, a stratum of freeborn commoners in the middle, and enslaved people at the bottom.⁸

In contrast to other forms of historical Native captivity in North America, Northwest Coast slavery possessed a number of distinctive traits, and scholarly knowledge regarding the institution has been developed through the works of numerous archeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians. As summarized by Orlando Patterson, a preeminent scholar of slavery, the status of an enslaved person consists of four constituent parts: the status of the enslaved is permanent, his/or status is created and maintained by violent exertions of power, slaves experience “natal alienation,” and the status of enslavement carries a certain stigma or “dishonor.” According to anthropologist Leland Donald, all four of these components are applicable to the practice and institution of Northwest Coast slavery. Unlike many other systems of captivity in Native North America, slavery as a status was inheritable on the Northwest Coast, thus the child of an enslaved mother was likewise enslaved. The majority of enslaved people on the Northwest Coast were captured in violent circumstances, primarily warfare in raiding, and slaves belonging to a titleholder’s household were often subjected to various forms of systemic violence. Like in other systems of chattel slavery, enslaved persons were considered as property of the titleholder’s household or clan, and pertinent literature suggests that they were conceptualized as non-human by the free populations with whom they resided, though this latter point is controversial. This extreme dehumanization ties in well with Patterson’s last two characteristics of enslavement. Enslaved people on the

⁸ Kenneth M. Ames, “Slaves, Chiefs and Labor on the Northern Northwest Coast,” *World Archaeology* vol. 33, no. 1 (June 2001): 1-17; Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 1-11.

Northwest Coast experienced dehumanization through natal alienation in that the act of enslavement severed the ties of kinship necessary for legitimate personhood in Northwest Coast societies, being violently alienated from their home communities. Exceptions to this circumstance were made for those of high rank who were captured in warfare, as captives of greater means could be “redeemed” through ransom by family members. Overall, however, the status of slavery carried an immense degree of stigma and was typically perceived as the highest dishonor. As explained by Peter Kelly, a Haida reverend and Native rights activist who grew up in the late-nineteenth century, slavery was a dishonor not only to the enslaved but to the community from which he or she was captured. According to Kelly, to be taken captive in a raid demonstrated personal weakness as well as the weakness of the attacked community in that it displayed that community’s inability to protect its own people, further relating an oral history in which a Haida woman took her own life rather than be taken captive. Although it is unclear whether this perception was shared by all or even the majority of Northwest Coast societies, the view presented by Kelly demonstrates the immense dishonor associated with being taken captive and or made a slave.⁹

Freeborn perceptions of the enslaved as “dishonored,” “non-human” property in Northwest Coast societies meant that slaves could be traded, bartered, or gifted (and even killed) in potlatch ceremonies. Indeed, enslaved people were highly valued as items of trade and brought status to their owners in the “prestige economy.” Thus, in both pre- and

⁹ Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 70-73; Orlando Patterson, “Slavery,” *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 3 (1997): 407-449; Peter Reginald Kelly, “Peter Kelly Interview,” interviewed by Imbert Orchard ca. 1965, Imbert Orchard Fonds, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives (audio cassette).

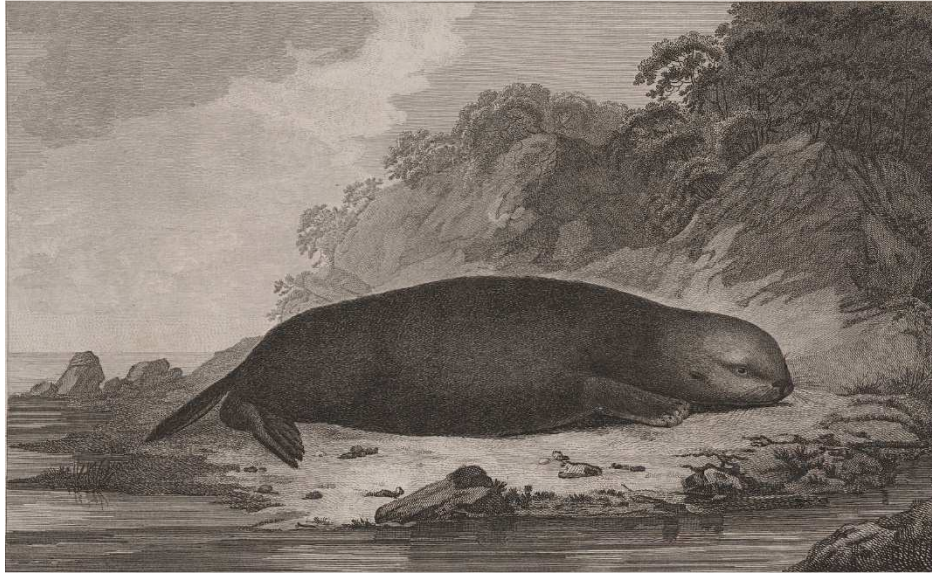
post-contact times, extensive slave trading networks existed as did the frequent acquisition of captives through war. As Donald observes, women and children were generally favored as potential captives during slave raids, many captured in raids were already enslaved, and such attacks were so commonplace that most villages were fortified at the time of contact. Prior to the contact period, slave raids typically occurred within close proximity of the raiders' village, and while most raids were maritime in nature, some were carried out on foot. Slave-trading networks in the contact period were immensely complex, and it appears that these networks were already in use during the pre-European era. The complexity of these networks indicates that the demand for captives was high in many Indigenous communities, and while this can partly be attributed to their role in the "prestige economy," Donald (among others) argues that the value of slave labor was likewise a determining factor. Slaves not only bolstered the prestige of titleholders, but further performed valuable and necessary labor in local subsistence economies alongside commoners, allowing their owners to pursue activities relevant to their status as titleholders. The rich marine environment of the Northwest Coast necessitated the effective management of resources and manpower, and thus slave labor was crucial to this management. Additionally, slave labor provided advantages in that slaves (owing to their status) existed outside of the normal parameters of gender in Northwest Coast societies, as anthropologist Kenneth Ames argues. Among the free population, the division of labor was regimented along gendered lines, and the status of enslaved people as "genderless" meant that they could perform tasks typically assigned to

the opposite gender.¹⁰ As such, their labor was highly valued given this versatility, though it remains unclear whether Ames' analysis is universally applicable to Northwest Coast societies.

The factors and conditions of slavery on the Northwest Coast coalesced to create complex economies of violence, and these characteristics of the Northwest Coast slave complex would later prove important with contact and the initiation of Euro-American colonialism in the fur trade. As this chapter will argue, Northwest Coast slavery formed a baseline which would structure various forms of captivity in the maritime fur trade, and the aspects of the Indigenous slave system outlined would be adapted to the circumstances of the trade and its outcomes. This is particularly true for the practice of slave raiding and the regional slave trade. Slave raiding, already a potent political and economic weapon in the pre-European era, would assume new imperatives and urgency with the scramble for "soft gold" in sea otter pelts during the trade, as well as allow a new class of middleman titleholders to grow wealthy and politically influential. The slave trade network of the Northwest Coast would likewise be altered by the Euro-American presence, and in the maritime fur trade period, Euro-Americans participated in the slaving economy directly. Furthermore, the power dynamics of the Northwest Coast system of rank, itself sustained by slavery, would come to structure the myriad interactions, captivities, and forms of violence to emerge as a result of the trade. As such, the system of Indigenous slavery on the Northwest Coast proved critical to the events of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹⁰ Ames, "Slaves, Chiefs and Labor on the Northern Northwest Coast," 1-17; Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 103-146.

Captivity and Encounter in the Maritime Fur Trade



Depiction of a sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) c. the late-eighteenth century. The exorbitant value placed on the sea otter's thick coat ("soft gold") by Euro-American traders and Chinese merchants triggered an intensive (and violent) series of hunts on the Northwest Coast that resulted in immense changes for Indigenous societies.¹¹

The first documented European-Indigenous encounter on the Northwest Coast was between Russians in the Chirikov Expedition and Tlingits in 1741. Although the encounter was brief and consisted of an apparently awkward exchange of goods on the water, it left an indelible impact on Russian perceptions of Native people. A number of crew members wandered to the shore, ostensibly to search for supplies, and failed to return. The Russian explorers surmised that the missing sailors had been taken captive, though it appears likely that the missing men deserted. The next major encounters between Euro-Americans and the Native peoples of the Northwest Coast initiated the early stages of colonization in the maritime fur trade. In July of 1774, a Spanish

¹¹ *A Sea Otter*, ca. 178-, Archives drawings, paintings, and prints collections, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives.

expedition under the command Juan Pérez made contact with a party of Haidas off the northern coast of Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), the second major encounter after Chirikov's expedition. During this reconnaissance mission, dispatched to counter Russian incursions in the Spanish-claimed North Pacific, a number of Haida canoes paddled within reach of the ship and its occupants, scattering white feathers and singing as a gesture of peace before commencing a "brisk" trade with the Spaniards. The Spaniards received sea otter, wolf, and beaver pelts in exchange for varied goods including knives, initiating the first of countless exchanges which came to characterize the maritime fur trade.¹²

Spanish expeditions, launched initially to enforce Spain's claims to the North Pacific and conducted under a veil of secrecy, did not remain hidden from public view in Europe and the United States for long. Britain soon learned of Spanish activities in the North Pacific, and in 1778, Captain James Cook's expedition to the Northwest Coast brought the United Kingdom into the fray. Furthermore, the widespread publication of Cook's findings ignited Euro-American public interest, and soon the maritime fur trade began in earnest. The 1780s were a decade of frenzied Euro-American trading and exploration forays into the waters of the Northwest Coast, catalyzing the rise of what would become a multi-million-dollar industry at its heyday. Euro-American traders, especially Americans outfitted in Boston, soon found a highly lucrative market for luxurious sea otter pelts in China, whose various manufactured goods (including silk and

¹² James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 12-22; Herbert K. Beals, trans., *Juan Pérez on the Northwest Coast: Six Documents of His Expedition in 1774* (Portland, Oregon: The Oregon Historical Society Press, 1989), 75-81; Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) 41-85.

porcelain) were in high demand in both the United States and Europe. Indeed, English Captains Nathanael Portlock and George Dixon of the ships *King George* and *Queen Charlotte* fetched nearly \$55,000 at Canton following extensive trade with Indigenous people on the Northwest Coast in but one example of the highly lucrative nature of the trade in sea otters. Though American traders had come to dominate the sea otter trade by the late 1780s at the expense of other Euro-American players, the maritime fur trade had become a bustling enterprise, and various native groups were eager to do business with traders regardless of their nationality. Given the geography of the Northwest Coast and the transient, maritime nature of the trade, Indigenous peoples on the outer coast came to benefit most (as well as monopolize) from these exchanges. Groups such as the Haida, the Sitka Tlingit, and above all, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth, came to occupy a privileged position in the emerging economic order, one that would have immense implications for the Native socio-economic landscape of the region.¹³

The privileged position offered to outer coast peoples in the early maritime fur trade generated profound economic and political changes for the communities most involved. This was especially true for Nuu-Chah-Nulth peoples of western Vancouver Island. With the massive infusion of wealth and Euro-American manufactured goods, Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholders embarked on processes of power-consolidation that shifted the regional balance of power, processes in which captivity played a paramount role. One such person was the Mowachaht titleholder Maquinna of Yuquot at Nootka Sound, who by the 1790s had become perhaps the most powerful Indigenous leader on the coast. Owing to Nootka Sound's fortuitous geography as a natural harbor on the outer coast, it

¹³ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 18-35; Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 85-111.

grew to become a preeminent trading center throughout much of the maritime fur trade. Between 1785 and 1795, 70 of the 107 foreign vessels engaged in the Northwest Coast trade during those years called at Nootka Sound, a situation which created opportunities for Yuquot which Maquinna readily exploited. Maquinna positioned himself as a middleman between Native people and Euro-American traders, using his family's hereditary rights to local lands, waters, and resources to exact tribute from outsiders who wished to trade with foreign vessels, transforming Nootka Sound from a seasonal hunting site into a predominately year-round settlement and port of call of which he was the primary manager. One example of this middleman role came in Euro-American reports that the Nimpkish of northern Vancouver Island delivered to Maquinna almost 6,000 otter pelts a year during the 1780s and 1790s for trade with foreign merchants, indicating the scale of his network, his growing monopolization of regional trade, and the wealth which his village enjoyed during the period. Maquinna's growing power was additionally bolstered by the construction of Fort San Miguel (or *Santa Cruz de Nutka*) by Spaniards in the early 1790s. Though the Spanish settlement was short-lived and Spain was ultimately ousted from the Northwest Coast as a result of the Anglo-Spanish "Nootka Controversy" (a turn of events which dealt a blow to Maquinna), Fort San Miguel provided Maquinna with increased trade and with much needed goods, particularly foodstuffs, enabling him to devote more resources to his various activities.¹⁴ Nootka Sound's metamorphosis into a year-round port of call devoted primarily to trading

¹⁴ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 153-160; Ruth Kirk, *Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast: The Makah, Nuw-Chah-Nulth, Southern Kwakiutl and Nuxalk* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 201-214; Douglas Cole and David Darling, "History of the Early Period," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7: Northwest Coast*, ed. William C. Sturtevant and Wayne Suttles (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 119-134.

introduced dislocations to the local Indigenous economy, resulting in food shortages arising from a shift from traditional subsistence patterns to a predominately merchant economy.¹⁵ Maquinna initially welcomed the creation of Fort San Miguel as a mechanism by which to circumvent these dislocations (although relations with the Spanish sporadically turned violent), allowing a brief respite from critical shortages and enabling his rise to power. Furthermore, through gift-giving via the potlatch ceremony as well as arranged marriages, Maquinna forged an enlarged network of economic, political, and tributary alliances on Vancouver Island, creating a veritable confederation with Yuquot at its center.¹⁶ Maquinna's rise to power, however, was far from peaceful in nature.

Conflict, particularly slave raids, served a critical function in creating and maintaining Maquinna's networks. The introduction of Euro-American firearms to Nuuchah-Nulth communities via their privileged position in the early maritime fur trade was a particularly important factor in allowing titleholders such as Maquinna to exact power through violence. As historian David J. Silverman relates, English sailors from the Vancouver Expedition found Maquinna and his people in possession of at least one-hundred Spanish muskets in 1792, and Captain George Vancouver found that Kwakwaka'wakws on eastern Vancouver Island possessed firearms obtained from the Nuuchah-Nulth through trade. Many firearms were likewise obtained from American traders. According to Spanish Botanist José Mariano Moziño in his account of Nootka

¹⁵ The problems produced by Nootka Sound's shift to a trading economy were by no means unique to that community. Other outer coast groups, most notably the Haida, and the decline of the maritime fur trade in the nineteenth century produced even more severe dislocations for outer coast groups.

¹⁶ David J. Silverman, *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 161-165.

Sound in 1792, *Noticias de Nutka*, the American captain John Kendrick sold Maquinna one swivel gun and furnished his ally Wickinash of Clayoquot with “more than two hundred guns, two barrels of powder, and a considerable portion of shot,” indicating the extent to which Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholders amassed Euro-American weaponry. Through the acquisition of firearms, Maquinna was able to expand his power through military prowess, and raiding became a means through which to accomplish this end. In an attempt to secure greater political power and attain sea otter pelts for trade with Euro-Americans, Maquinna led a naval assault on an unnamed community to the north of Yuquot, netting a “great booty of sea otter skins” according to Englishman John Meares. In his captivity narrative, John Jewitt described one such raid which took place in 1804 in which he participated. By 1804, Nootka Sound had begun to decline in importance to the trade due to sea otter population decline and tensions with Euro-Americans stemming from incidents such as the attack on the *Boston*, weakening Maquinna and frustrating his attempts to maintain power and prestige. To stymie the growing threat to his power, Maquinna launched a raid on another (likely Nuu-Chah-Nulth) village fifty miles away which Jewitt referred to as *A-y-charts*. At dawn, Maquinna’s party launched a surprise attack on the village, killing an undisclosed number of its inhabitants, plundering its otter skins, and taking several captives, four of whom Jewitt was allowed to keep and “consider as mine.” Jewitt’s account is perhaps the best recorded example of Maquinna’s raiding and slaving activities, and it is apparent that the titleholder embarked on many such excursions during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Maquinna expanded his slaveholdings through raiding and trading, in turn protecting his community from slave raids at the height of his power. Furthermore, Jewitt related that by 1803,

Maquinna possessed almost fifty slaves in his household, indicating his success in the regional slaving economy.¹⁷ Maquinna's rise to power, as well as his extensive slaving activities, thus appear as a direct product of circumstances arising from the maritime fur trade.

Another powerful Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholder to benefit from the maritime fur trade was Wickaninnish, leader of the village Opitsatah at Clayoquot sound. Wickaninnish, who entered an alliance with Maquinna through an arranged marriage, arguably utilized violence and slave-raiding to a greater effect than his ally during his rise to power. The Haachahts people of Barkley Sound more than any other group experienced the brunt of Wickaninnish's consolidation of power, falling prey to a ten-year campaign of subjugation fueled by Clayoquot's immense stores of Euro-American weaponry. During this lengthy war, Wickaninnish plundered extensive quantities of sea otter pelts and, one can assume, captives, wealth which he used to further bolster his own strength through the purchase of ever greater numbers of Euro-American firearms. The alliance between Wickaninnish and Maquinna further fortified the former's regional influence, and this relationship evidently proved beneficial to both men. One example of this mutually beneficial relationship was a raid on the Haachahts intended to cement the alliance between Yuquot and Clayoquot, carried out by Maquinna on Wickaninnish's behalf. With an army of almost 600 men, Maquinna launched a surprise raid at dawn on the Haachahts, killing and capturing nearly everyone in the village. This attack and its

¹⁷ Silverman, *Thundersticks*, 165-175; José Mariano Moziño, *Noticias de Nutka: An Account of Nootka Sound in 1792*, trans. Iris Higbie Wilson (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1970), 71; Alice W. Shurcliffe and Sarah Shurcliffe Ingelfinger, eds., *Captive of the Nootka Indians: The Northwest Coast Adventure of John R. Jewitt, 1802-1806* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1993), 77-79.

outcome not only proved Maquinna's loyalty and netted the titleholder greater wealth and prestige, but further benefited Wickaninnish in his campaign to subjugate the Haachahts. Such attacks sent a message to all those who would resist the influence of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth power-players, utilizing violence and fear of enslavement to further the political aims of Maquinna and Wickaninnish. Furthermore, as historian Joshua Reid argues, such violence was in many cases "the result of imperialism," since the scramble for sea otter pelts generated by the maritime fur trade created "displaced violence" which "happened along indigenous lines of tension."¹⁸ As such, the shifting political and economic landscapes of the trade with Euro-Americans were fundamentally tied to acts of violence of which captivity was a constituent part. Indigenous forms of captivity were not, however, the only forms of violence to characterize the maritime fur trade period.

With contact and the initiation of the maritime fur trade in the late-eighteenth century, fluid, complex, and often contingent interactions ensued within the context of mutual cultural illiteracy in which captivity often played a paramount role. The taking of hostages in order to attain certain goals played a crucial role in the early years of the maritime fur trade. Historian David Igler describes captive-taking in these contexts as "convention," the voluntary exchange of hostages occurring with such frequency that it constituted a mutually-intelligible protocol. Igler further claims that contact "was a process by which notions of freedom and captivity intersected and were constantly negotiated" and that these processes were ultimately a phenomenon that operated at "local, regional, and Pacific-wide" levels given the need to assert power and authority in

¹⁸ Silverman, *Thundersticks*, 165-175; Reid, *The Sea is my Country*, 69-70.

complicated, dynamic circumstances by all groups involved.¹⁹ Essentially, the “convention” of hostage-taking described by Igler functioned as a mechanism through which Euro-American and Indigenous agents asserted their demands in contact scenarios characterized by linguistic and cultural barriers. However, one must question the degree to which Igler overemphasizes the “voluntary” and “mutual” nature of such exchanges, a line of analysis which draws heavily from historian Richard White’s notion of “the middle ground.”²⁰ While many interactions involving the use of hostages were voluntary and mutual, however, an equal number were non-consensual and implied anything but an equal footing with regards to power. As this chapter will demonstrate, Euro-American traders and explorers in particular were quick to exploit the use of hostages to achieve various ends as well as to employ “pedagogic violence”²¹ in what amounted to one-sided exchanges of power.

The taking of hostages, whether voluntary or involuntary, began with the earliest expeditions to the Northwest Coast and soon became a pervasive feature of Indigenous-Euro-American interactions. In a 1779 voyage to the Northwest Coast, the ships *Princesa* and *Favorita*, then commanded by Ignacio de Arteaga and Juan Bodega y Quadra,

¹⁹ David Igler, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 73-99; David Igler, “Captive-Taking and Conventions of Encounters on the Northwest Coast, 1789-1810,” *Southern California Quarterly* vol. 91, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 3-25.

²⁰ First published in 1991, Richard White’s *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* put forth the analytic framework of “the middle ground” in observing Indigenous-Euro-American interactions in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region. Emerging from mutual cultural misunderstanding and an “inability of both sides to gain their ends through force,” “the middle ground” entailed conventions of mutual adaptation and compromise by both parties to achieve objectives in contact scenarios in which neither possessed power over the other.

²¹ As articulated by Benjamin Madley in his work *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*, “pedagogic violence” refers to violent actions (including murder) undertaken by Euro-American colonists against Indigenous people to “teach” them not to challenge their colonizers. In the Northwest Coast maritime fur trade, Euro-Americans oversaw acts of violence, including killing, the threat of killing, and the destruction of settlements with a clear pedagogical aim.

arrived to Bucareli Bay in Tlingit Country in search of a suitable site for a prospective Spanish garrison. Though the exchange between expedition members and local Tlingits began amicably, a number of incidents (including the destruction of a cross erected by the Spanish) produced friction. This tension reached a boiling point when two crew members of the *Princesa* went missing, prompting Arteaga to seize a nearby canoe and take its occupant hostage. A standoff ensued between the crew of the *Princesa* and the local Tlingit community in which a sailor offered to the Tlingits in exchange for a titleholder was seized, prompting conflict in which the *Favorita* opened fire on Tlingit canoes and killed at least one person. During a stay at Fort San Miguel at Nootka Sound, Francisco de Eliza oversaw a strikingly similar exchange. A cabin boy disappeared from Eliza's ship *San Carlos*, prompting crew members to storm Maquinna's village in search of the boy, taking two locals hostage in order to secure the boy's return. Eliza's men soon learned that the cabin boy had deserted to Yuquot of his own volition, and the hostages were freed and provided with gifts as compensation.²² Such instances not only demonstrate the imperial sense of entitlement which Euro-American agents felt to seize and exert power over Indigenous individuals, but likewise indicated the important role of captivity in the form of hostage-taking in controlling contact scenarios. Furthermore, Euro-Americans active on the Northwest Coast were quick to take notice of slavery within the Indigenous societies they interacted with. To assert power over Native people (particularly those of high status) through hostage taking represented a profound (albeit temporary) inversion of the indigenous sociopolitical order.

²² Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 320-321.

Like Spaniards active on the Northwest Coast, British and American agents likewise used the practice of hostage-taking as a tool for leverage in their interactions with Indigenous people, often in ways which complicate Igler's description of the "convention" of captive-taking. One such agent was captain James Colnett, who from 1786-89 led a British expedition to the Northwest Coast in which the taking of Native hostages was a veritable protocol. In July of 1787, Colnett detained an elderly man (presumably a titleholder) at Nootka Sound, suspecting the latter of hostile intentions. In 1791, Colnett oversaw yet another hostage-taking scenario at Clayoquot Sound. Following the death of six presumably British sailors whose vessel had collided with rocks in the vicinity of Clayoquot, Colnett took a titleholder by the name Tootiscoosettle and one other lesser titleholder hostage, threatening to kill the two men and "every native he could find" unless the bodies were procured. Colnett evidently got what he desired, as Tootiscoosettle survived only to be taken hostage again, this time by American captain Robert Gray of the *Columbia*, the latter of whom had a particularly violent reputation among Indigenous people and Euro-American traders alike. In June of 1791, Gray detained Tootiscoosettle, ostensibly to force the return of a missing crew member named Atu (a native of Hawai'i) whom he assumed local villagers were harboring. This incident began proceedings overseen by Gray in which Wickaninnish participated, and according to *Columbia* crew member John Boit, Clayoquot emissaries returned to the ship some time after with Atu before ransoming Tootiscoosettle. This was not the last violent encounter between the people of Clayoquot and Captain Gray, however. In 1792, Gray ordered his crew to raze Wickaninnish's village of Opitsatah after its inhabitants had departed for a potlatch ceremony. Gray suspected that Wickaninnish had hostile

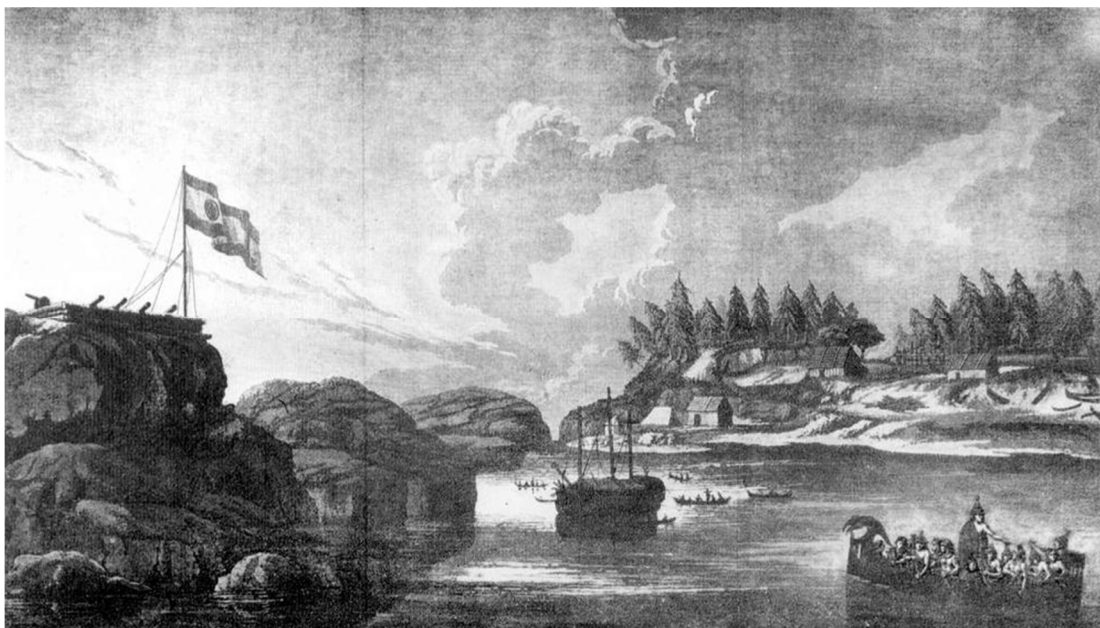
intentions given the latter's accumulation of firearms and previous hostile encounters such as his abduction of Tootiscoosettle. As Boit described it, the village, which consisted of upwards of 200 homes "generally well built for Indians," was "in short time totally destroy'd" after Gray's crew set fire to every structure.²³ This incident, which evidently contributed to tensions culminating in Wickaninnish's failed attack on the brig *Tonquin* almost ten years later, had its roots in multiple factors arising from the maritime fur trade and its impact on indigenous communities. Political and economic realignments combined with the practice of hostage-taking and the questionable motives of individual Euro-American actors produced friction which sporadically erupted into violence, demonstrating the multiple moving parts and contingencies which Euro-American colonialism in the maritime fur trade unleashed on the Northwest Coast. Hostage-taking thus acted as fuel for conflict in an ironic turn, complicating Igler's portrayal of such practices as generally mitigating conflict. The negotiation of such confrontations and the assertion of power, however, were far from the only rationale which animated the taking of hostages.

In many cases of Euro-American hostage-taking, economic gain was the primary motivation for detaining Indigenous people. Such manifestations of violence typically took on the form of ransoming high-ranking Indigenous men for sea otter pelts and other valuable objects during visits to multiple ports of call on the Northwest Coast. John Kendrick, an eccentric American captain and associate of Robert Gray active in the

²³ Robert Galois ed., *A Voyage to the North West Side of America: The Journals of James Colnett, 1786-89* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 105-107; Igler, "Captive-Taking and Conventions of Encounters on the Northwest Coast," 8-12; Silverman, *Thundersticks*, 168-170; John Boit, *A New Log of the Columbia*, ed. Edmond S. Meany (n.p., n.d.), 25-27.

Pacific Basin during the late-eighteenth century, was one of many Euro-Americans who participated in the emerging ransom economy. During a 1789 stay at Haida Gwaii, Kendrick took two Haida titleholders captive, ostensibly in retaliation for a previous theft. Kendrick proceeded to tie his hostages to two ship cannons and threatened to blow the men up unless the stolen items were returned and the Haidas turned over their entire fur supply. Kendrick ultimately received what he wanted, and the furs he ransomed soon were added to his growing fortune. Haida Gwaii in particular appears to have been a hotbed of Euro-American ransoming. The Haida titleholder Kow reported that in 1795, English captain William Wake of the ship *Prince William Henry* imprisoned him and two other prominent titleholders before ransoming them for 200 sea otter skins. A similar incident occurred in 1802 when American captain Jona Briggs took two Haida titleholders captive at Masset before returning them in exchange for 100 furs. Such incidents justifiably enraged Haida communities, and a number of violent incidents erupted as a result of Euro-American depredations. In 1791, Haidas at Coyer's Harbor in southern Haida Gwaii attacked the *Columbia* in retribution for past transgressions by Kendrick. The attack was a failure, however, as forty-five Haidas were killed, though Haida retribution continued and Haidas garnered a reputation as being "warlike" among Euro-Americans. Indeed, in 1801, Haidas attacked the ship *Belle Savage*, and in response, the crew of the ship *Charlotte* abducted and executed five Haida titleholders.²⁴ As such, Euro-American ransoming of indigenous leaders for financial gain was not only pervasive, but generated cascades of violence that proved detrimental for Native people.

²⁴ Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 160-170; Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 14-15.



The Short-lived Spanish settlement of Santa Cruz de Nutka and Fort San Miguel in the late-18th century.²⁵

Despite its scale, however, the taking of hostages was not the only form of captivity in which Euro-Americans engaged. Euro-Americans participated directly in the institution of Native slavery and the Indigenous slave trade in myriad ways. The first to implicate themselves in the Indigenous slave trade were Spaniards, who employed a host of justifications for their involvement. In 1789, at the height of Anglo-Spanish tensions regarding nominal control of Nootka Sound, captain José Estéban Martínez of the ship *Princesa* oversaw the purchase of a number of slave children from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. These purchases were ostensibly motivated by Euro-American fears of Indigenous cannibalism, which by the 18th century had become a common trope in western perceptions of Native people. Martínez had received reports from multiple colonial agents that Maquinna and his sub-chief, Callicum, routinely cannibalized slave children

²⁵ *Drawing of Spanish fort in Nootka Sound*, ca. 1800, Archives visual records collection, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives.

from their households, and John Kendrick alleged that he had been offered “a chunk of meat from a four year-old child.” Regardless of the veracity of these claims, Martínez was motivated to purchase an enslaved boy and bartered a young girl in exchange for a pot and a frying pan, christening the two as “Estéban” and “María de los Dolores.”²⁶

Spaniards involved in the Indigenous slave trade likewise used Christianization as a pretense for purchasing enslaved children. As reported by José Mariano Moziño, Spaniards had been in the habit of purchasing captives from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth taken in previous wars. As Moziño related, “they [the Nuu-Chah-Nulth] sell them [captives] to the Spaniards, who have had the generosity to buy them, not in order to keep them in the sorry lot of slavery, but in order to educate them as sons and bring them to the bosom of the Holy Catholic Church.” Though Moziño did not disclose the number of enslaved persons purchased or whether they were in reality freed from their “sorry lot of slavery,” the motivation of Christianization as a rationale for this engagement is clear. Alejandro Malaspina, in his 1791 expedition to Nootka Sound, claimed that no fewer than twenty enslaved children were purchased from Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholders in exchange for goods such as copper sheets, rifles, and cloth. These children were ultimately transported to San Blas in New Spain, and Malaspina cited the “charity” of a certain Father Don Nicolás de Luera in overseeing their “social and Christian instruction” and their baptism, likely inducting them into New Spain’s mission system. At the conclusion of his three-year stay at Nootka in 1792, captain Francisco de Eliza reported that at least fifty-six children were purchased by Spaniards at Nootka, Clayoquot, and the Strait of Juan de

²⁶ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 189-190.

Fuca in order to transported to Spanish territories in that year.²⁷ Taken together, these accounts indicate that during Spain's brief tenure as an imperial player on the Northwest Coast, Spanish agents had a proportionately high level of involvement in the Indigenous slave trade given the number of enslaved persons purchased relative to the Native population.

Though Spaniards were perhaps the most heavily involved group in the period's Indigenous slave trade by the sheer number of captives purchased, they were far from the only group involved. In particular, certain American traders from Boston sought to profit from the traffic in human bodies unburdened by the pretense of Christianization. One such American trader was Captain George Washington Eayers of the ship *Mercury*, who developed an infamous reputation among other Euro-Americans as an unscrupulous slaver. On one occasion, Eayers took eleven free Makah men hostage aboard the *Mercury* under the pretense of trading sometime in the early-nineteenth century,²⁸ forcing them to hunt for seals down the coast as slaves before abandoning them in California in one of several kidnapping incidents for which he became feared. Captain David Nye of the ship *New Hazard*, who was regarded as a "tyrant" by his own crew, was another American well-known for his involvement in the slave trade. Active during the first decade of the 19th century, Nye was known to purchase slaves from one Indigenous group before transporting the enslaved for resale to another, turning a profit in the process. On one occasion, Nye purchased two slaves from the Nahwitti Kwakwaka'wakw, selling them to

²⁷ Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, 312-314; Moziño, *Noticias de Nutka*, 40.

²⁸ Ruby and Brown do not the specify the exact year in which Eayers took these men captive. However, three of these men were recorded as having been ransomed by the Chinooks near Fort Astoria in 1811, making it likely that Eayers kidnapped them sometime in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Haidas just days later for the price of three otter skins total. John Boit reported in his log of the *Columbia* that the Makah titleholder Tatoosh offered to sell the ship's crew a number of slave children taken in a war (though it is unclear if they were actually purchased), and Samuel Furgerson, carpenter of the American brig *Otter*, alleged that Samuel Hill (the ship's captain) purchased a ten year-old boy from Haidas at Skidegate for "fifteen clamons [elk hide armor], four otter skins and two blankets," likely for resale. The actions of these men represented a recurring pattern among American traders. As English sailor Peter Corney summarized in his account of trading voyages between 1813-18, "the slave trade is carried on, on this coast, to a very great extent by the Americans. They buy slaves to the southward and take them to the northward, where they exchange them for the sea otter and other furs. If they cannot buy slaves cheap, they make no scruple to carry them off by force."²⁹ Exploitation of Indigenous slavery by American traders, whether for labor or for profit, evidently occurred on a pervasive scale and represented the complex intersections between indigenous captivities and Euro-American economies arising from the maritime fur trade.

One of the more destructive and exploitative forms of slavery to emerge from Indigenous-Euro-American encounters was that of forcible prostitution. Although prostitution and sexual slavery most likely existed among Northwest Coast societies previous to Euro-American colonization given how rapidly the traffic in sexual slavery emerged, the practice evolved in both scale and severity during the maritime fur trade.

²⁹ Mary Malloy, "*Boston Men*" on the Northwest Coast: *The American Maritime Fur Trade, 1788-1844* (Kingston, Ontario & Fairbanks, Alaska: The Limestone Press, 1998), 39, 54-55; Boit, *A New Log of the Columbia*, 9; Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Indian Slavery in the Pacific Northwest* (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1993), 76-83.

Accounts of prostitution and “immodesty” are abundant in the journals of traders, whether English, Spanish, American, or Russian, and although the traders themselves often did not remark on whether the women they observed were captives, in many cases their unfree status can be inferred. In *Noticias de Nutka*, Moziño noted the common practice of prostitution in the area, claiming that “the *taíses* [titleholders] themselves prostitute these women, especially to foreigners, in order to take advantage of the profit earned from this business.” Moziño proceeded to surmise that the women in question were the wives of the titleholders themselves.³⁰ Such assumptions were the norm among Euro-American commenters on Northwest Coast prostitution, and were buoyed by decades of racist thinking in which Indigenous masculinities and femininities were cast as “defective.” What is noteworthy about Moziño’s assumptions is that they are directly contradicted by the accounts of other (primarily British) colonial agents, who lauded upper-class Nuu-Chah-Nulth women for their “modesty” in comparing them to Indigenous women of other ethnicities. Such conflicting accounts of Nuu-Chah-Nulth women not only highlight the many contradictions central to Euro-American racial and cultural thinking, but further indicate the cultural ignorance of many colonial agents, ignorance that often obscured the complexities of social life and social status among Northwest Coast peoples. Whether or not the women prostitutes Moziño described were in fact the wives of prominent titleholders is ultimately impossible to verify, though it is highly likely that the women were in fact enslaved, a possibility that appears likelier when corroborated with other accounts.

³⁰ Moziño, *Noticias de Nutka*, 43.

One such account came from Alejandro Malaspina's 1791 voyage to the Northwest Coast. In a visit to Russian-claimed territories in Alaska, Spanish sailors employed the sexual services of "women [who] were slaves captured in warfare." Similar reports were produced by traders of other nationalities as well. Englishman Alex T. Walker, a member of John McKay's crew, described multiple visits to Maquinna's village at Nootka Sound and to Haida Gwaii, in which he witnessed interactions indicative of slavery and its connection to prostitution. In a July entry, Walker claimed that Maquinna offered a "wife" to John McKay as a "[pledge] of friendship," though whether the woman in question was one of Maquinna's relations or an enslaved person is unclear. However, this incident provides a contrast to a later one described by Walker during a visit to Haida Gwaii in which a woman was offered for sexual services. Though Walker did not perceive the woman as being enslaved, she did not possess a labret, an adornment used by women in Haida society to signify high rank and nobility.³¹ The absence of a labret indicates that the unnamed woman had no relation to the titleholder who offered her, making it likely that she was enslaved, as observed by Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown. A strategy typically employed by titleholders was the arranged marriage of female relations to Euro-American men. This practice typically aimed to include Euro-American traders in titleholders' networks of kinship, thus consolidating power and working to earn trading privileges. It appears unlikely that offering female relatives for sexual services was intended to produce similar results, and despite the racist assumptions of Euro-American agents, that titleholders would use their own relatives for

³¹ Ruby and Brown, *Indian Slavery in the Pacific Northwest*, 84; Alexander Walker, ed. Robin Fisher and J.M. Bumstead, *An Account of a Voyage to the North West Coast of America in 1785 & 1786* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 69, 129-136.

this purpose. It is likely, then, that the prostitution described in Euro-American accounts involved enslaved women from the titleholder's own household given the absolute power granted to slaveholders. Regardless of the status of female prostitutes, however, the provision of sexual services to Euro-Americans produced catastrophic consequences for Indigenous societies participating in the maritime fur trade.

In the late-eighteenth century, infectious diseases introduced by Euro-Americans in the maritime fur trade decimated many Native communities on the Northwest Coast, and prostitution catalyzed the spread of these afflictions. Although smallpox was the chief culprit in population decline among outer coast groups coinciding with intensive contact in the late-eighteenth century maritime fur trade, the spread of venereal diseases posed another destructive threat to certain communities in that its influence often coincided with European crowd disease epidemics. Though venereal diseases such as syphilis may have first been introduced to Vancouver Island by Spanish sailors in the 1770s, there is compelling evidence to suggest that sailors with the 1778 expedition of Captain James Cook were among the first to introduce the epidemic. David Samwell, a ship surgeon in Cook's service, documented the introduction of venereal disease to the Hawaiian Islands, and Cook's men have been implicated in the spread of gonorrhea and syphilis throughout the Pacific Basin.³²

Bound up in these epidemics was the use of captives as prostitutes. Indeed, epidemiologist Robert Boyd contends that the Northwest Coast institution of slavery “dovetailed nicely with the demographic and mercantile characteristics of the maritime

³² Robert Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874* (Vancouver & Seattle: UBC Press & University of Washington Press, 1999), 61-67.

newcomers,” producing a situation “ripe for the spread of venereal disease.” During a visit to Nootka Sound, Samwell described the arrival of “two or three girls” aboard Cook’s ship for the purposes of prostitution whom he assumed were the female relations of local men. However, crew member William Ellis surmised that the women were in reality members of an unnamed group that the Mowachaht had “overcome in battle,” thus indicating their status as captives. Given the circumstances, as well as Samwell’s knowledge of venereal disease among Cook’s crew, it is likely that such epidemics were introduced to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth through the prostitution of enslaved women such as those described by Ellis. One distinct incident was recorded by trader John Hoskins in 1791 at the village of Nittenat on southwest Vancouver Island near the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Hoskins described the village titleholder “Cassacan” as being “troubled with the venereal to a great degree,” further elaborating the circumstances through which he became infected. Sometime before Hoskin’s visit, Cassacan had sold a “slave girl” to the unnamed captain of a merchant vessel for “several sheets of copper.” However, when the ship departed, the enslaved girl in question was sent back ashore and engaged in intercourse with Cassacan, shortly after which she passed away. Following this interaction, Cassacan contracted an unnamed venereal disease (likely syphilis or gonorrhea) and passed it onto his wife, causing serious physical distress to both.³³ This sequence of events is perhaps one the most clear examples of the connection between the spread of venereal disease and sexual slavery involving female captives in the maritime fur trade.

³³ Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 61-67; Igler, *The Great Ocean*, 94-97.

It is important to note, however, that the spread of venereal disease likewise had dangerous implications for Northwest Coast communities in their impairment of human reproduction. In *The Great Ocean*, David Igler writes that in addition to the outright death created by diseases such as smallpox in so-called “virgin soil epidemics,” the spread of venereal diseases had “catastrophic” consequences for Indigenous communities in that they “critically attacked” the ability of infected peoples to reproduce. Venereal syphilis and gonorrhea produced “lower birthrates, higher infant mortality, and chronic ill health that undermined immune resistance to other introduced pathogens,” creating a situation in which affected communities were not only unable to replenish their populations but were rendered even more vulnerable to other European-introduced diseases. It is noteworthy that Cassacan, the Nittenat titleholder previously mentioned, contracted (and miraculously survived) a bout of smallpox sometime after his health was eroded by venereal disease, as Hoskins noted during a return visit to the village. Thus the example of Cassacan concretely demonstrates the linkages between sexual slavery in the maritime fur trade, venereal disease, and subsequent vulnerability to other introduced diseases such as smallpox. In the case of communities that enjoyed the most lucrative position with Euro-Americans in the early maritime fur trade, the effects of venereal disease-induced infertility were far-reaching. This is evident in John Boit’s account. In a visit to Clayoquot Sound, Boit remarked that though the community possessed “upwards of 3000 souls,” the people of Clayoquot suffered from infertility and that “barrenness [was] very common” among the village’s women. During the *Columbia*’s stay at Clayoquot, Robert Gray visited a nearby village and found its chief titleholder severely ill and near death with an unnamed illness. The sick titleholder was surrounded by a retinue

of eight men who “kept pressing his stomach with their hands,” an action which may indicate severe gonorrhea-related complications.³⁴ Taken together, the information provided by Boit indicates that the people of Clayoquot were by 1792 severely affected by introduced venereal diseases. Given historical knowledge regarding the village’s preeminence in the early maritime fur trade as well as intensive slaving activities related to Wickaninnish’s consolidation of power, it is likely that there too the relationship between the captive economy, sexual slavery in the maritime fur trade, and venereal disease combined to produce this devastation.

Although the exact number of disease-related casualties among Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples during the maritime fur trade is difficult to calculate with certainty, deaths almost certainly numbered in the thousands. Indeed, Robert Boyd estimates that out of a total Northwest Coast population of almost 190,000 in 1770, the population by 1810 stood between 110 and 120,000, a decline mostly attributable to smallpox.³⁵ As we have seen, however, while smallpox was by far the largest killer, it was not the only culprit in what amounted to a region-wide demographic catastrophe. The spread of venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea operated in tandem with other crowd disease epidemics, producing a volatile situation in which Native communities were less able to resist subsequent outbreaks and in which their ability to reproduce and recover lost population was inhibited. Captivity in the form of sexual slavery was at the center of

³⁴ Igler, *The Great Ocean*, 43-71, 94-97; Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 61-67; Boit. *New Log of the Columbia*, 18-19.

³⁵ Robert Boyd, “Demographic History, 1774-1874,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7: The Northwest Coast*, ed. William C. Sturtevant and Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990): 147-148.

this conundrum, and its legacy would have far-reaching implications for Indigenous people on the Northwest Coast in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

The demographic catastrophes experienced by Indigenous communities on the outer coast as a result of sexual slavery were one of the many complications brought about by the captivities and violence emerging from the maritime fur trade. Slave raiding, “displaced violence,” hostage-taking, and Euro-American involvement in the Indigenous slave trade constituted a complex web of related conflicts and captivities unique to the circumstances of contact in the maritime fur trade. Indigenous and Euro-American societies, each with their own hierarchies and regimes of power, entered into interactions in which a high degree of mutual cultural illiteracy and misunderstanding could erupt into conflict at any moment. Long before Euro-Americans arrived on the Northwest Coast, Indigenous societies were marked by entrenched social stratification in the system of rank, a reality which the presence of institutionalized slavery makes abundantly clear. The enslaved, as natively-alienated individuals whose stigma carried connotations of non-personhood, whose status was hereditary, and who were considered as the absolute property of their households, formed a stratum whose very presence reified constructions (as well as perceptions) of power manifest in Northwest Coast societies. The presence of slavery and enslaved people on the Northwest Coast arguably formed a baseline for interactions and negotiations of power arising from contact. This is evident in the practice of hostage-taking by Euro-Americans in particular. Whether motivated by economic

incentives or other impetuses, the taking of titleholders as hostages served to enforce Euro-American desires for power in dynamic situations. Furthermore, such actions served as temporary inversions of the Indigenous socio-political order, and it is no accident that this form of captivity occurred as Euro-Americans observed the presence of slavery in Indigenous societies.

Intra-group interactions between Indigenous peoples during the maritime fur trade era likewise included slavery and captivity as a baseline component. The rise to power of prominent titleholders such as Wickaninnish and Maquinna, itself a result of shifts induced by the trade, saw raiding, violence, and the act of enslavement as pervasive routes to dominance in the new economic order. “Displaced violence” stemming from imperial influences was further compounded by the material demands and conditions of the trade, a reality evident in the introduction of Euro-American firearms and the use of conflict as a means by which to continually acquire sea otter pelts and other crucial items of trade. While these changes enriched certain communities in the short-term, they produced dislocations that eventually proved destructive with the decline of the maritime fur trade, and communities such as the Haachats experienced depopulation and enslavement as a result of the trade’s economic imperatives. Furthermore, Euro-American “pedagogic violence” against Indigenous people produced further dislocations for communities on the outer coast, as did Euro-American involvement in Native slavery, particularly in the form of disease. As such, violence and captivity were pervasive features of the maritime fur trade period, features which would further evolve during the nineteenth century.

III. BURNT FORTS AND BLOODY BAIDARKAS: POLITICS, PROFIT, AND CAPTIVES IN ALASKA AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Introduction



Property of Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

Photograph of the Raven Helmet worn by K'alyaan in the 1804 Battle of Sitka as it appeared in the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska between 1901-1911.³⁶

Passed down by generations of tradition-bearers in the Tlingit Kiks.adi clan of Sitka, the helmet above appears remarkably well-preserved despite its age of more than two-hundred years. Though its dull copper eyes have lost their gleam over time, their presence indicates an item designed for nobility, copper being among the most valuable materials in the pre-capitalist Tlingit economy. At first glance, the artifact may appear

³⁶ William T. Shaw, *Raven Helmet of K'alyaan in the Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka, Alaska, between 1901 and 1911*, ca. 1906 (?), University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections.

unassuming, bereft of the ostentatious adornment of a crown. However, the smooth black beak and mottled tufts appearing before the contemporary observer in the Sheldon Jackson Museum of Sitka, Alaska, is no less regal or lacking in historical importance. This helmet, presented in Kiks.adi ceremonies to this day, was carved in the countenance of a raven, emblem of one of the two great Tlingit moieties. As Russian colonists fought to retake Sitka Sound from rebelling Tlingit forces in 1804, it was worn by K'alyaan, the nobleman and war chief of the Kiks.adi under whose leadership the Tlingit clans of Southeast Alaska united to expel the *Anooshi* (Russians) invading Tlingit Country in 1802. Erupting in the wake of nearly a decade of Russian incursions into Tlingit Country which saw widespread exploitation of Tlingit resources and people, the anti-Russian uprising of 1802 and the subsequent battle of 1804 represented a pivotal moment in both the history of what would become Alaska and the Northwest Coast as a whole. Though few in number, the St. Petersburg bureaucrats and Russian-Siberian fur traders (*promyshlenniki*)³⁷ who sailed across the Bering Strait into the fragmented islands and fjords of the Alexander Archipelago would fundamentally alter Tlingit country, itself a constituent piece of a larger Indigenous North Pacific world.³⁸

The often-overlooked battles of 1802 and 1804 in which K'alyaan was a key organizer may appear at first glance as minor installments in a long procession of conflicts between North America's Indigenous peoples and Euro-American colonizers. Far from being marginal, however, these episodes were representative of a world in

³⁷ The singular form of *promyshlenniki* is *promyshlennik*.

³⁸ Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer, and Lydia T. Black eds., *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka, Russians in Tlingit America: The Battles of Sitka 1802 and 1804* (Seattle & Juneau: University of Washington Press & Sealaska Heritage Institute, 2008), 397-98.

violent transformation, larger than any one battle, nationality, or individual. At the turn of the nineteenth-century, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Northwest Coast found themselves ensnared in a matrix of multi-national colonialisms whose galleons and sloops plied the Inside Passage. Once unknown to Euro-Americans, by 1800 the Northwest Coast played host to colonial processes driven by the unrelenting quest for thick, lustrous sea otter pelts in the maritime fur trade. Tlingit Country and much of coastal Alaska were no exception. However, in contrast to much of the rest of the Northwest Coast, the Indigenous peoples of maritime fur trade-era Alaska contended with a unique set of circumstances manifest in the Russian Empire's distinctive approach to colonization in the region via its state monopolies, first with the Golikov-Shelikhov Company (SGC) and later the Russian American Company (RAC). Though the tactics employed by these companies shared many features with the extractive merchant colonialisms of other Euro-American powers on the Northwest Coast, they operated under entirely different parameters than the largely independent American and British traders active in the region. Russia's colonial companies attempted to exact absolute political subordination to the Empire from Alaska's Native people, laying claim to their bodies, resources, and labor in ways which distinguished Russian methods from other Euro-American players. More importantly, however, Russian colonists employed regimes of coerced and captive labor in the Native communities they occupied (primarily Aleut and Alutiiq peoples), preferring to force Indigenous people to extract valuable resources for the companies' financial benefit. Furthermore, when Russian colonists began their push into Southeast Alaska in the late-eighteenth century, they encountered in the Tlingits a society in which slavery and captivity were vital components of the

socioeconomic order, so much so that Tlingit conceptualizations of slavery became a framework through which titleholders interpreted Russian actions and agendas. In this setting, Russian and Tlingit captivities collided as the RAC attempted to exploit Tlingit Country's abundant natural wealth, and the resulting conflict was one in which captivity was not only an instigating factor, but a tool of negotiation.

Early Encounters, Captives, and the Creation of “Russian America”



Russian map of the North Pacific and American possessions.³⁹

The Russian-Tlingit conflicts of 1802 and 1804 were preceded by decades of contact and interaction between the two parties as well as the consolidation of a new colonial regime in “Russian America.” The first known Tlingit-Russian encounter

³⁹ *General'naia karta Ledovitago moria i Vostochnago okeana*, ca. 1844, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, United States Library of Congress.

occurred in 1741 as a result of the so-called Second Kamchatka Expedition led by Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikov. The expedition made little direct contact with Tlingits, though rather infamously, a number of crew members sent ashore off of the coast of Southeast Alaska never returned. Chirikov and company assumed that the missing men had been killed or taken captive, a notion which animated Russian perceptions of *Kolosh* (Tlingit) “savagery” that would later guide policy. However, Tlingit oral histories suggest that the disappeared crew members deserted and were integrated into Tlingit communities where they possibly married local women. The next Russian expedition to Tlingit country took place in 1783 under the Zaikov Expedition, by which time it would not be until the leadership of Grigory Shelikhov, a wealthy and prominent *promyshlennik*, that any serious and concerted Russian push into Southeast Alaska was made, however. Under his auspices, the Shelikhov-Golikov Company was created in 1783 for the organized exploitation of Alaska’s fur-bearing resources. Shelikhov requested that an imperial monopoly be granted to the company only to have the request denied by Empress Catherine the Great, though Russian expansion continued.⁴⁰

Following the Second Kamchatka Expedition in the decades leading up to Russian expansion into Tlingit country, *promyshlenniki* and colonial administrators first established themselves in the Aleutian and Kodiak Islands. This process was fueled by the subjugation of Aleut and Alutiiq peoples in their homelands. Such subjugations were characterized by extreme violence as exemplified by the 1784 Awa’uq (or “Refuge

⁴⁰ Andrei Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 92-99; Aleksei I. Chirikov, trans. Lydia T. Black, “Report to the Admiralty College, December 7, 1741, No. 302 (Excerpt),” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 7-9; Andrew P. Johnson, “Part Two: The Russians Move into Sitka,” told in English and recorded by A.P. Johnson, Sitka, 1979, transcribed by Richard Dauenhauer, in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 115-21; Mark Jacobs Jr., “Early Encounters Between the Tlingit and the Russians, Part One,” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 5-6.

Rock”) Massacre, in which 130 *promyshlenniki* slaughtered some 500 Kodiak Alutiiq men, women, and children. Over 1,000 (or 4,000, according to Shelikhov) Kodiaks had gathered at a “Refuge Rock,” a type of defensive settlement used by Alutiiqs and Aleuts, in resistance to Russian demands for hostages. The *promyshlenniki*, under Shelikhov’s orders, stormed the settlement with rifle and cannon fire, resulting in a bloodbath that was perhaps among the largest colonial massacres of Indigenous people in North American history. The killings at Awa’uq were devastating to Alutiiq and Aleut resistance, resulting in firm Russian control and settlement of Kodiak Island. Furthermore, by Shelikhov’s own estimate, almost 1,000 Alutiiq people were taken captive, transported to the company post of Three Saints Bay, and forced to work following the incident.⁴¹ Indeed, Russian violence against the peoples of coastal Alaska was motivated by the fundamental impulse to compel Indigenous labor for the company. It was no coincidence that more than any other Indigenous group in the American North Pacific, Aleuts and Alutiiqs were renowned for their skill and efficiency in hunting sea otters. Armed with spears that were particularly well-suited to hunting marine wildlife and sealskin *baidarkas* (vessels similar to kayaks), Aleut and Alutiiq men were trained from boyhood in the skill of sea otter hunting, in contrast to *promyshlenniki*, whose experience was primarily with land-based fur trapping. Given this disparity in skills and a context in which marine (rather than

⁴¹ Rick Knecht, Sven Haakanson, and Shawn Dickson, “Awa’uq: Discovery and Excavation of an 18th Century Alutiiq Refuge Rock in the Kodiak Archipelago,” eds. Bruno Frohlich, Albert B. Harper and Rolf Gilberg, in *To the Aleutians and Beyond: The Anthropology of William S. Laughlin* (Copenhagen: Publications of the National Museum of Denmark Ethnographical Series Volume 20, 2002), 177-192; Heinrich Johan Holmberg, trans. Fritz Jaensch, ed. Marvin W. Falk, *Holmberg’s Ethnographic Sketches* (Fairbanks: The University of Alaska Press, 1985), 1985; The exact number of casualties at Refuge Rock varies depending on the source, with Kodiak Alutiiq elder Arsentii Aminak (interviewed by Holmberg) estimating 300 dead and some Russian witnesses estimating 500 or more.

land) mammals were the imperative of profit and expansion, securing control over Indigenous labor was prioritized by the SGC and later the RAC.⁴²

In contrast to Russian colonial ventures in Siberia, where the compulsory fur tribute system of the *iasak* formed the basis of extraction of Indigenous Siberian resources, Russian colonists developed a colonial economy around the organization of Aleut and Alutiiq men into large hunting teams as *partovshchiki*, Indigenous hunter-laborers under the direction of Russian overseers. From the late eighteenth century until reforms undertaken by the RAC in 1818, a large proportion of *partovshchiki* were compelled to work in a condition termed *kaiurstvo*,⁴³ a system in which Indigenous individuals were used as uncompensated captive laborers who could be bought, sold, and “loaned.” Many *kaiury* were former slaves of Indigenous individuals “redeemed” by Russians through purchase. Aleuts and Alutiiqs could likewise be compelled to work by debt peonage, and Indigenous women (aside from the wives of prominent village leaders) in areas under Russian control were required to perform menial labor for the companies as a general rule. Some *partovshchiki* were forced to hunt when their family members were taken captive as *amanaty* (hostages) in a practice which generally involved the exchange of such hostages (sometimes voluntarily) to maintain peace or accomplish negotiations, an approach which had long-standing precedent in the Russian conquest of Siberia and was utilized extensively in Alaska. Taken together, Indigenous laborers organized under varying degrees of unfreedom were classified by colonial authorities as

⁴² Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 75-81.

⁴³ In Russian, *kaiurstvo* denotes the general practice; the words *kaiur* and *kaiury* were used in reference to unfree males in the singular and plural sense respectively, while women bound in the condition were called *kaiurka*.

“dependent natives.” When in 1806 the German-Russian naturalist Georg von Langsdorff arrived at the colony, he remarked on the Aleut and Alutiiq laborers interned there as “perfect slaves to [the RAC].” Though this comment reads as one informed by condescension today, Langsdorff’s observation captured the truth of Russian exploitation of Native populations in Alaska. As such, the creation of Russian America and its accompanying violence was defined by captivity and the exploitation of unfree Indigenous labor through an array of practices, traits which distinguished Russia from other Euro-American powers on the Northwest Coast. As historian Gwenn A. Miller notes, the Russian system of compulsory labor in Alaska differed markedly from the fur trade practices of other Euro-American colonial powers, further stating that the practices utilized by Russians in Siberia (particularly relating to captivity) were “grafted” onto the Alaskan landscape in ways that allowed the colonizers to adapt and profit from its marine environment.⁴⁴ Taken together, the early success and viability of the Russian-American economy was largely predicated on practices of captivity and unfree labor.

It was in this context of violent expansion in the Aleutian and Kodiak Islands and the accompanying formation of regimes of unfree labor that Russian colonists began their first serious push in Southeast Alaska’s Tlingit Country in June of 1792. That year, a young Alexander Baranov, then primary director of the Golikov-Shelikhov Company (and future governor of the RAC and “Russian America”), undertook an expedition to Chugach Bay on the northern edge of Tlingit Country. Accompanied by 300 Alutiiqs and

⁴⁴ Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 75-81; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian American*, 68, 91-116 329; Gwenn A. Miller, *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 13, 25-27; Georg H. Von Langsdorff, *Langsdorff’s Narrative of the Rezanov Voyage to Nueva California in 1806*, trans. Thomas C. Russell (San Francisco: The Private Press of Thomas C. Russell, 1927), 13.

Aleuts, 17 Russians, and 20 Chugach hostages taken to secure compliance from the locals, Baranov and his crew set up camp on the night of the 20th. When night fell, the camp was caught completely off guard by a seemingly unprovoked Tlingit (probably Yakutat) raid. Likely motivated by past transgressions by the Chugach, the Tlingit force emerged from the shadows disguised in painted wooden helmets described by Baranov as “hellish,” charging into the gathered tents with their spears. The *promyshlenniki* and their Native allies fired on the raiders in panic, only for their bullets to glance off of the wooden plate armor (*kuiak*) worn by the attackers. The fight lasted into the early morning, when the raiders dispersed following the arrival of Russian reinforcements. By the afternoon, eleven of Baranov’s men lay dead and some four of his Chugach hostages had been taken captive by the Tlingits.⁴⁵ Furthermore, when a flotilla commandeered by captains E. Purtov and D. Kuliakov again reconnoitered Yakutat Bay in 1794, they learned from a chief of the Yakutat that the Chugach captives taken two years previous had been sold as slaves “farther than the bay of the Chilkats.”⁴⁶ As such, one of the first expeditions undertaken by Russian colonists to initiate settlement of Southeast Alaska was characterized by captive-taking and almost derailed by conflict with Tlingits, demonstrating a pattern that would persist in Russian-Tlingit interactions.

In 1799, the Russian march southeast resulted in the construction of the first Russian settlement on Sitka Sound on the western edge of present-day Baranof Island. Just one year prior, the Shelikhov-Golikov Company was reorganized as the Russian

⁴⁵ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 101-104; K.T. Khlebnikov, *Baranov: Chief Manager of the Russian Colonies in America*, trans. Colin Bearne, ed. Richard A. Pierce (Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1973), 8-10; Frederica de Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 158-161.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

American Company (RAC) and granted a state monopoly in Alaska by Tsar Paul II, a move that more resembled Western European colonial approaches and was novel for the Russian Empire. The initial site, built under the orders of Baranov, then the director of the new RAC, is known in historical literature as “Fort Mikhailovskii,” and it included a small village as well as a stockade.⁴⁷ The creation of the settlement was sanctified in a ceremony that included a show of military force replete with cannon fire and aided by *kaiury*, an Orthodox Christian procession with a “cross of the saviour,” and the placement of a symbolic plate inscribed with the words “Land of Russian Possession.” Though locals from Sitka were invited to the event, relations were fraught from the beginning and actual Russian possession of the land existed in name only. In a letter to fellow administrator Emel’ian Larionov dated July 24, 1800, Baranov outlined various difficulties experienced by colonists at Mikhailovskii involving the nearby Tlingits.⁴⁸ His complaints included the open, “shameless” trade in firearms between Natives and English and Bostonian traders following Russian attempts to prohibit the use of such weapons by Indigenous people. He likewise cited frequent “insults” to Russian authority. One such affront according to Baranov was an incident in which he and 22 company personnel entered the main Sitkan village armed with cannons after a female interpreter was allegedly beaten and robbed by villagers. Baranov and his men found themselves surrounded by some 300 Tlingits armed with rifles, and the incident nearly erupted into

⁴⁷ Naming customs for the initial pre-1802 Russian settlement at Sitka vary depending on the source. In *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, Andrei Grinev uses the term “Fort Mikhailovskii” (or “Old Sitka”), and for the purposes of this chapter, that name will be used.

⁴⁸ Alexander Baranov, “Ceremony and Procession, Sitka, October 1799,” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Lydia T. Black, 123-28; Alexander Baranov, “Letter to Larionov, July 24, 1800,” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Dmitri Krenov, ed. Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly, 137-41.

open conflict.⁴⁹ In spite of the pomp and pageantry of empire, Fort Mikhailovskii's first year of existence was marked by high tensions with its Tlingit neighbors.

The fort itself was located several miles north of the main Tlingit village of Sitka. Like elsewhere in Tlingit country, political divisions within the village of Sitka were complex. Sitkans used (and continue to use) the word *kwaan* to describe their community as a whole. The *kwaan* of Sitka was itself divided into four main clans, each belonging to one of the two great moieties (matrilineal lines) of the Tlingit people, the Ravens and the Eagles. At the time of Russian settlement, the four clans of Sitka were the Kaagwaantaan and Chookaneidi (belonging to the Eagle moiety), and the L'uknax.adi and Kiks.adi (belonging to the Ravens). Of these four, the Kiks.adi were likely the largest and most influential given their leading role in the coming conflict, and it was from this clan that the two ring leaders of the 1802 rebellion would arise: K'alyaan and Shka'wulyeil.⁵⁰ Little is known of either aside from their roles in the uprising and in Tlingit-Russian diplomacy, though it is certain that Shka'wulyeil was the maternal uncle of K'alyaan. In the matrilineal Tlingit social system, the maternal uncle, rather than the father, functioned as the most important male figure and role model for young men and boys (particularly among the nobility), thus Shka'wulyeil mentored K'alyaan through boyhood in becoming a nobleman and warrior deserving of his rank. As the highest ranked individual of the Sitka Kiks.adi, it was Shka'wulyeil's duty to groom K'alyaan as a successor.⁵¹ This relationship would prove critical in the coming war against Russians.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that multiple Kiks.adi leaders have possessed the name "K'alyaan," as the name is an inheritable title. However, the K'alyaan that appears in this paper was likely the first to possess the name, and is furthermore the most famous Tlingit leader to bear the name.

⁵¹ Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black, *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 103-6; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 119.

There is still some debate as to what ignited the rebellion of the Tlingit coalition in 1802. Scholars have cited multiple factors as catalyzing Tlingit grievances into war, notably the depletion of Tlingit resources (particularly sea otters) by *partovschiki* and RAC policies which infringed on Tlingit trading practices. It is further worth noting that Baranov himself took measures to maintain amicable relations with the Tlingits of Sitka, efforts which included specific instructions that company personnel treat the Tlingits with greater care than that given to Alutiiqs and Aleuts. Despite such instructions, however, it is clear that these efforts were not effective. Russian prohibitions on the sale of firearms to Native people as well as the overwhelming dominance of British and American wares in the maritime fur trade translated into a Tlingit preference for trade with non-Russian Euro-American agents. Indeed, by the early 1790s, Tlingits possessed large numbers of western-manufactured firearms, a development which surprised many Euro-American observers and illustrated the burgeoning exchange between Tlingit villages and western traders. During the heyday of the maritime trade, Tlingit communities on the Pacific side of the Alexander Archipelago and their leaders found themselves in a highly lucrative position relative to groups further inland as middlemen. The Sitka *kwaan*, and the Kiks.adi clan to which K'alyaan belonged, were one such group whose geography allowed them privileged access to seasonal trading vessels.⁵²

This trade, of course, was entirely contingent on access to the sea otter pelts which foreign sailors so craved. As Russian colonial forces spread southeast from the Kodiak Islands and into Tlingit country, this access was imperiled. The bulk of the Russian colonial workforce in Alaska, both under the SGC and RAC, was composed of

⁵² Silverman, *Thundersticks*, 155-90; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 113-38.

expert Aleut and Alutiiq hunters, with a majority being *kaiury* or otherwise “dependent” laborers. Aleuts and Alutiiqs were well known for their skill and efficiency in hunting sea otters, and the RAC deployed large numbers of *partovshchiki* in Tlingit country as otter populations in the Aleutians grew scarce. With the establishment of a permanent Russian presence in Tlingit country, first at Yakutat and then at Sitka, came a veritable army of skilled sea otter hunters. By 1802, sea otter populations were depleting rapidly all along the Northwest coast due to the profit-driven motive of the fur trade along with high demand in world markets, and nowhere was this precipitous decline more apparent than in Russian Alaska. Competition with skilled Aleut and Alutiiq hunters in the employ of the RAC and sea otter population decline jeopardized Tlingit trading relations, a prospect which was particularly alarming to coast Tlingit communities such as the Sitkans. Historian Andrei Grinev claims that Tlingits were further enraged by the behaviour of many *partovshchiki*, who allegedly plundered Tlingit graves on multiple occasions and left large amounts of refuse on Tlingit hunting grounds. Tlingit grievances relating to the over-exploitation of the local sea otter population by the RAC would later surface during negotiations between the two parties after the 1802 attack.⁵³

While disputes between Tlingit communities and the RAC regarding overhunting were undoubtedly a major contributing factor to the 1802 uprising, grievances related to Russian captivity practices and exploitation of the Tlingit population were likewise central to the anti-Russian uprising. In Tlingit oral histories recalling the conflict and its lead-up, a recurring grievance is the allegation of Russian abuse of Tlingit women.

⁵³ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-139; George Thornton Emmons, *The Tlingit Indians*, ed. Frederica de Laguna and Jean Low (Seattle & New York: University of Washington Press & The American Museum of Natural History, 1991), 324-28.

Andrew P. Johnson, a Kiks.adi elder and tradition-bearer, described incidents in a 1979 oral interview in which RAC employees ambushed and violated local women in the vicinity of Sitka as they gathered berries in the nearby forest.⁵⁴ Grinev describes Tlingit indignation arising from unreciprocated marriages between company employees and the daughters of nobles, given that such arrangements required a substantial gift exchange between the parties and were viewed as illegitimate and violatory when such standards were not met. Tlingit nobles likely regarded Russian failures to reciprocate in such marriages as tantamount to a form of slavery imposed on their daughters, and such fears were not entirely irrational given the RAC practice of compelling Aleut and Alutiiq women to work without compensation. In the years following the establishment of Fort Mikhailovskii, Russian colonists further attempted to enforce the system of compelled female labor developed in the Aleutians on Tlingits (minus those of high rank), a development that only served to further sour relations.⁵⁵

Further damaging Russian-Tlingit relations was the Russian practice of “acculturating” Tlingit children, especially those of the nobility. The colonial leadership perceived the process of “Russianizing” Tlingit children as not only beneficial for Tlingits themselves through the introduction of “civilization,” but further saw this policy as potentially beneficial to the company (and the empire) in the long run. According to this logic, a new generation of Russianized Tlingit children would promote acquiescence to the empire and help to spread Russian hegemony. In such cases, Tlingit children were transported to the de facto RAC headquarters at Kodiak (generally with the initial consent

⁵⁴ Andrew P. Johnson, “Part Two: The Russians Move into Sitka,” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, told in English by A.P. Johnson, Sitka, 1979, transcribed by Richard Dauenhauer, 115-22.

⁵⁵ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-139; Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 75-88.

of their families), where they were taught “Russian ways” in the form of Orthodox religious instruction as well as to read and write. In addition to such exercises, however, was the Russian practice of compelling Tlingit children at Kodiak to perform menial labor and chores. This aspect of “acculturation” was interpreted by Tlingits as a form of slavery. Indeed, Johnson states in his history of the Sitka conflict that Tlingits generally viewed the RAC as desiring the Tlingits to “serve them.” This view is corroborated by Grinev, who argues that due to flawed translations and the non-existence of terms such as “empire” or “autocracy” in the Tlingit language, many Tlingits understood Russian attempts to enforce sovereignty over their people as demonstrating the intent to enslave them.⁵⁶ As such, captivity and slavery were central not only to the Russian economic strategies that jeopardized Tlingit trade interests, but further lay at the heart of Tlingit conceptualizations of the Russian presence.

In addition to these widespread grievances, a number of events are described as having been the “last straw,” the spark to ignite the eruption. According to Grinev, two possible reasons for the final break in Russian-Tlingit relations were the 1801 murder of a chief from the Kuiu-Kake community and his family by *partovshchiki* and the imprisonment of a Kootznahoo village chief’s nephew for a minor offense. Other explanations focus on the role played by Stoonook, an influential Kaagwaantaan shaman from Sitka. According to Tlingit oral histories, Stoonook traveled to the nearby village of Klukwan to visit with other relatives of his clan. While eating dinner, an unnamed young man allegedly insulted Stoonook by vulgarly mocking the integrity of the Sitka

⁵⁶ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 100-101, 116-43; Johnson, “Part Two: The Russians Move into Sitka,” 115-22; Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 121-22.

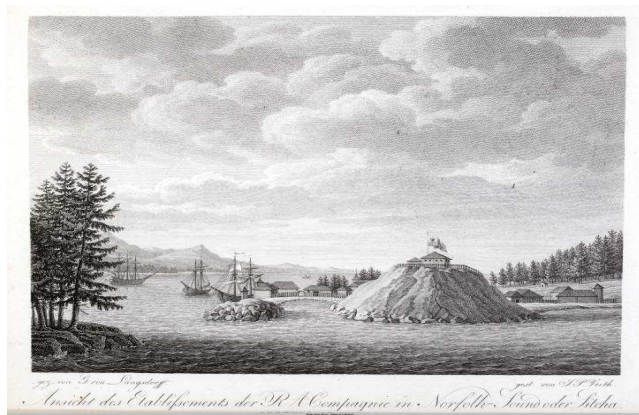
Kaagwaantaan, stating that Sitkans were “dominated” by their Russian occupiers in what may have been a bid to provoke Sitka into taking action against the invaders. Such an insult to an individual of Stoonook’s rank could not go ignored. Stoonook immediately returned to Sitka, where he relayed what had been said to Sitkan leaders of other clans, including K’alyaan and Shk’awulyeil. Another, more controversial immediate cause for the uprising also emerges in Tlingit oral accounts. An unnamed Kiks.adi nobleman was allegedly invited to dine in Fort Mikhailovskii for giving alms to an old, ostracized Russian man from the village. The nobleman fell ill while eating, and the Russian hosts subsequently revealed that the old Russian man had died and that they had fed their Kiks.adi guest slices of his thighs as a cruel “joke.” While this account may strike the reader as outlandish, it is recurrent in Tlingit histories of the uprising. Given the extreme taboo associated with cannibalism in Tlingit culture, and that such a grievous insult was delivered to a nobleman no less, this incident is said to have produced an uproar. Word spread among the houses of Kiks.adi and to the other clans of the area, and thus a meeting was convened. K’alyaan called for his war helmet, and when a decision was reached, leaders of all the houses stomped and kicked at the fire they stood around in a symbolic display of rage.⁵⁷ They then issued the following declaration: “The Russians have now gone far enough. We are not animals. We are not savages, to eat our own flesh. We declare war.”⁵⁸ This statement has been variously attributed to either K’alyaan or Shk’awulyeil. Regardless of which of the two said it, the uncle and nephew in that

⁵⁷ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-17; Andrew P. Johnson, “Part One: The Battle of Sitka 1802,” 157-65; Sally Hopkins (Shxaasti), “The Battle of Sitka,” in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, recorded by the National Park Service, Sitka, Alaska, August 1958, translated and transcribed by Nora Marks Dauenhauer, 351-373.

⁵⁸ Andrew P. Johnson, “Part Two: The Russians Move into Sitka,” 121.

moment became co-leaders in a nascent uprising that would involve the majority of Tlingit kwaans in Southeast Alaska as well as some non-Tlingits. What occurred next would have repercussions not only for Tlingit country and the RAC, but for the changing political, economic, and social fabric of the Northwest Coast as well.

The Battles of Sitka: Conflict and Captivity



RAC fort of Novo Arkhangelsk circa 1805. The fort was built as a replacement for Mikhailovskii following the Russian recovery of Sitka in 1804. It was built further south of the original settlement on top of *Noow Tlein* (“Castle Hill”), the site of the main village of the Sitka Tlingit.⁵⁹

In late June, 1802, Fort Mikhailovskii and Sitka Sound likely appeared as similar to the image above. The cold currents of its natural North Pacific harbor are peppered with small islets, themselves splinters of the larger islands of the intricate Alexander Archipelago. Rugged mountains rise abruptly from the shoreline, standing guard over the promontories and peninsulas below. To visitors approaching the site by water in June 1802, the settlement must have appeared as a huddled mass of wooden homes and palisades dwarfed against a wall of evergreen forest. Perhaps chattering and sounds of

⁵⁹ Georg H. Von Langsdorff, *Drawing of establishment of the Russian-American Company at Norfolk, Sitka Sound, Alaska, 1805*, ca. 1805, Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection, ca. 1764-1967, Alaska State Library.

labor hummed over the harbor as smoke slipped into the sky. Perhaps the omnipresent smell of salmon wafted through the maze of wooden planks as Tlingit women preserved the season's catch and a party of *partovschiki* set out in their seal skin baidarkas in search of "soft gold." By late afternoon, however ashes would fill the air.⁶⁰

At midday in early June (the exact date remains unclear), the Tlingit resistance forces under K'alyaan and Shk'awulyeil laid siege to Fort Mikhailovskii. By all accounts, the attack came as a surprise to those living in the settlement. Abrosim Plotnikov, a *promyshlennik* resident at the settlement on the day of the attack, describes the 1802 siege at Sitka with great detail in his 1805 testimony. That day⁶¹ Plotnikov went to a nearby stream to inspect company cattle. The bulk of the fort's male employees and *partovshchiki* had departed with captain Ivan Urbanov on a hunt for sea otters the previous day, and the twenty armed Russian personnel who remained, like Plotnikov, were entirely unprepared for what was about to occur. Upon returning to the settlement, he found himself staring at an army of almost fifteen-hundred Tlingit fighters,⁶² arrayed in painted faces and fearsome wooden masks. A fleet of some sixty-two war canoes filled the harbor as Shk'awulyeil barked orders from a nearby hill. Following a scuffle with four Tlingit warriors in the village farm, Plotnikov slipped out of a window. To his

⁶⁰ Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Black, *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 224, 235, 302, 308. Note: these depictions of Sitka Sound and the Russian fort date from 1805, one year after Russian colonists regained the area and almost three years after the initial siege of Sitka.

⁶¹ Though the exact day of the attack is unclear and varies depending on the account, it almost certainly occurred in mid to late June of 1802. Some of the confusion regarding dates stems from the use of the Julian Calendar in the Russian Empire at the time.

⁶² Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 128. Grinev also maintains that a number of Tsimshian and Kaigani Haida warriors took part in the attack.

horror, he saw the fort engulfed in seething fire.⁶³ As the blaze spewed ash into the sky, the attackers tossed sea otter skins and other company wares from the balcony to readied canoes below.⁶⁴ Such goods were not the only plunder that the attackers would depart with.

To Pinnuin Katerina, Alutiiq wife of colonist and *promyshlennik* Zakhar Lebedev, the day seemed mundane as any other. With little warning, the encroaching Tlingit army fired their rifles into the main fort garrison, shattering its shutters and reducing the windows to splinters. In their desperation, the defenders thundered cannons at their adversaries, but the Tlingit forces further battered their way inside. In the commotion, fire swept the facility as the women and children of the settlement, mostly Aleuts, Alutiiqs, and creoles (individuals of mixed Russian-Indigenous ancestry), hid in the cellar. Again, Russian cannon fire cracked a deafening roar in the cacophony as Katerina and others clambered out of the basement and into the hazy open. There, under a curtain of smoke and the flickering glow of fire, they were taken captive and huddled into departing canoes. For fifteen days, Katerina was held as a slave, a fate some 27 other denizens of Fort Mikhailovskii also met.⁶⁵

When the smoke cleared and the Tlingit attackers departed the smoldering pile of embers that remained of the fort, the corpses of twenty Russian defenders lay mangled in

⁶³ Some, such as Emmons, suggest that the fire was started by two dissident American sailors who had been living among the Tlingits of Sitka. The Kiks.adi account provided by Thompson appears to counter this assertion.

⁶⁴ A. Plotnikov and K. Pinnuin, "Eyewitness Testimonies of 1802 Survivors," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Lydia T. Black, 185-88; K.T. Khlebnikov, "Initial Settlements of Russians in America: The History of the Founding of Novo Arkhangel'sk (Old Sitka) and its Destruction by the Tlingit Alliance," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Lydia T. Black, 174-82.

⁶⁵ Plotnikov and Pinnuin, "Eyewitness Testimonies of 1802 Survivors," 185-88; Khlebnikov, "Initial Settlements of Russians in America," 174-82.

the ashes and those who survived had scattered into the nearby forest. A similar fate befell the Urbanov party, whose departure previous to the siege was taken advantage of by the attackers. K.T. Khlebnikov, an RAC administrator and close associate of Baranov, in providing a historical overview of initial Russian settlements in Tlingit country, states that on the evening previous to the attack, Urbanov's party set up camp near Bucareli Bay. Shortly after most of the *partovshchiki* had fallen asleep, a large force of Kake-Kuiu Tlingits quietly emerged from the dark, misty forest and raided the camp, leaving the assembled tents and baidarkas tattered and bloody. Urbanov himself was taken prisoner, but managed to escape his captors along with another captive. Both fled to the nearby forest where another seven Aleut survivors joined them. Between the raid on Urbanov's party and the siege of Sitka, 165 Alutiiq and Aleut men lay dead along with 25 Russians. By Khlebnikov's estimate, only 42 of Mikhailovskii's more than 200 inhabitants survived, 28 of whom were taken captive.⁶⁶ The fate of these captives resulted in a dramatic sequence of events emblematic of the complex role played by captivity in the colonial context of the Northwest Coast.



An artistic rendition of the 1804 Battle of Sitka. K'alyaan is at the forefront, armed with the blacksmith's hammer he attained in 1802 and wearing his raven helmet.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 171-2; Khlebnikov, "Initial Settlements of Russians in America," 173-82; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-43.

⁶⁷ Louis Glanzman, *Battle of Sitka*, ca. 1988, Sitka National Historic Park.

Pinnuin Katerina, one of the twenty-eight people taken in the attack, provided one of the few narratives about the captives' ordeal. In the fifteen days she spent as a slave of the Tlingit rebels, Katerina reported being moved initially to a nearby winter village (most likely that of the Kiks.adi) along with the other captives. Upon hearing rumor of a Russian dispatch from Kodiak on its way to the area, a party of Tlingit men departed to counter the force, only to return two days later having seen no combat but hearing word of the fate of the Urbanov party. After seeing what appeared to be a ship sailing in the distance, Katerina and the other captives were shuffled from village to village by Tlingit women, whom Katerina said were fearful of losing the clan's new slaves. However, at the end of her second week in captivity, Katerina, a *kaiurka* by the name of Ul'iana, and a third woman, along with fifty otter pelts looted from Mikhailovskii, were unexpectedly taken to an English ship over several days between July 12-17, almost two weeks after the attack at Mikhailovskii, and exchanged for a Tlingit man previously taken hostage by the ship's crew.⁶⁸

The ship in question was the *Unicorn*, captained by Henry Barber, a veteran of the maritime trade. One of the first records of the incident appeared in the May 29, 1803 publication of the Australian paper the *Sydney Gazette*, providing a brief account of the events of 1802. However, on November 18 1804 the *Gazette* published a longer extract from Barber's journal of the *Unicorn*. By his account, Barber and his crew were in the vicinity of Sitka on June 28 and were unable to locate the Russian fort. Upon returning to the *Unicorn* following a reconnaissance mission on the 30th, Barber found a local Tlingit

⁶⁸ Plotnikov and Pinnuin, "Eyewitness Testimonies of 1802 Survivors," 185-88.

nobleman, three American deserters, and a Russian captive who had previously boarded the ship in his absence. The American deserters informed the crew of the attack on Sitka, claiming that the Tlingits had forced them to participate, as well as estimating that upwards of 4,000 otter skins were looted during the siege. On July 1, the *Unicorn* anchored further up Sitka Sound, where Barber encountered the gruesome remains of Fort Mikhailovskii and learned of the captives held nearby. In his telling, Barber claims to have resolved to rescue the prisoners by any means possible.⁶⁹

After taking a number of nearby survivors aboard the *Unicorn* beginning on the 4th, on the 6th, Barber invited the previously mentioned American deserters and the Tlingit chief on board some days after they had returned to the chief's village, taking the latter and one of his attendants (possibly a slave) hostage and demanding that he turn over the "Russian" captives. On the 7th, two unnamed "Russian" (likely creole) women were turned over by the Tlingit, and on the 9th, the American vessels *Globe* and *Alert* entered the sound. Captains John Ebbes and William Cunningham agreed to cooperate with Barber, and that same day, the crews of all three ships launched an attack on the assemblage of Tlingit canoes that had gathered in the harbor to trade, killing a "number" of men, and taking seven Tlingits hostage, including the wife of a chief. On July 11, an unnamed Tlingit chief (likely Shk'awulyeil) was "tried" and executed aboard the *Globe*, and several "Russian" women (including Katerina) were exchanged with the Tlingits between the 12th and 17th. Finally, on the morning of the 19th, a flotilla of Tlingit canoes

⁶⁹ Ed. W. Wilfried Shuhmacher, "Aftermath of the Sitka Massacre of 1802: Contemporary Document with and Introduction and Afterword," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka* (Contains extracts from the "Sydney Gazette and Henry Barber's journal of the ship *Unicorn*"), 203-9; W. Wilfried Shuhmacher, "Henry Barber, Merchant Captain of the Pacific," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 211-16.

arrived alongside the *Unicorn* and traded thirteen captives for a chief and his wife, presumably releasing the additional Tlingit captives as well.⁷⁰ According to Barber, the *Unicorn* departed Sitka for Kodiak on July 22 with eight men, seventeen women, and three children (twenty-eight persons total) who had been captured at Mikhailovskii almost a month earlier, capping off roughly two weeks of negotiations.⁷¹

Though Barber describes his intent to recover the Sitka captives in 1802 as being motivated by humanitarianism, his account leaves out key facts that cast doubt on the heroic image he created for himself. According to Khlebnikov, when the *Unicorn* arrived at Kodiak on July 24, 1802, Barber, rather than immediately freeing the 28 captives, anchored off the shore of the Russian settlement and displayed his twenty cannons and armed men. Barber announced that although his nation and Russia were at war, he had brought the Sitka survivors for ransom out of “humanity,” proceeding to demand fifty-thousand rubles in cash or furs in exchange for the captives. Though Khlebnikov and Barber’s accounts contain discrepancies regarding the latter’s motivations, both accounts make clear that the twenty-eight captives were indeed delivered to Russian hands at Kodiak. Despite Barber’s bravado, however, Baranov stood his ground during negotiations at Kodiak. Ultimately, Barber received only ten-thousand rubles worth of furs in exchange for all 28 prisoners.⁷² Barber’s rationale for settling for a ransom less than that which initially demanded remains unclear, although he undoubtedly profited handsomely from the exchange given the high global demand for sea otter pelts.

⁷⁰ Barber does not specify the fates of the other Tlingit hostages aside from the aforementioned chief and his wife. Since they receive no mention in Barber’s account of the trek to Kodiak, it is implied that they were released following the return of the “Russian” captives.

⁷¹ Shuhmacher, “Aftermath of the Sitka Massacre of 1802,” 211-16.

⁷² Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 36-43; Shuhmacher, “Aftermath of the Sitka Massacre of 1802,” 203-9; Shuhmacher, “Henry Barber, Merchant Captain of the Pacific,” 211-16.

What then does one make of Henry Barber, whom Andrei Grinev refers to as having earned a reputation as a “base pirate and cunning slave trader” in Soviet and Russian historical literature? Some, such as Tlingit experts Nora and Richard Dauenhauer, speculate that Barber may have in fact intentionally instigated the 1802 siege of Sitka himself after selling arms and gunpowder to Natives in the area. According to this logic, Barber was possibly motivated by a desire to undermine the Russian position on the Northwest Coast in order to advance the position of British colonials in the North Pacific market. Grinev, however, argues that Barber was most likely not responsible for instigating the rebellion, claiming that Cunningham was a likelier culprit. Regardless of whether or not colonial agents did in fact conspire to instigate the Tlingit attack, it is important to remember that Tlingits had ample reason to rise up against the Russian occupiers on their own terms. Were Barber actually in league with the conspirators, however, it is possible that his motivations were largely economic in nature and that he had planned from the outset to doublecross K’alyaan and Shk’awulyeil in order to personally profit from the razing of Fort Mikhailovskii. It is likewise possible that Barber acted out of opportunism and simply took advantage of a volatile situation. Indeed, Khlebnikov claims that Barber had by that time developed a reputation for trading in captives and utilizing the practice of hostage-taking to further his own ends and profit economically. Though it is apparent that American captains were more active in the trafficking of captives in the maritime trade era (correlating with the economic

dominance of Americans in the period at large), Barber stands out as one of the more dramatic examples of Euro-American involvement in these practices.⁷³

Henry Barber, much like the violent Northwest Coast colonial context in which he operated in 1802, is representative of region-wide changes which fundamentally altered the economic, political, and social landscape of the Northwest Coast. Such shifts began in the earliest phases of the maritime fur trade and were largely solidified by the turn of the nineteenth century. Much like other agents of the fur trade, whether colonial or Native, Barber utilized captivity, whether in the trafficking of slaves or hostages, as a mechanism by which to achieve political and economic ends in a maritime Northwest Coast world increasingly defined by violence and uncertainty. In the case of the 1802 Sitka conflict, Barber opportunistically co-opted the captivities which had come characterize confrontations between Russians and Tlingits as well as Indigenous-Euro-American encounters across the Northwest Coast at large. Furthermore, given the numerous Tlingit grievances (including disputes related to Russian captivity practices), the campaign to expel the *Anooshi* from Tlingit country was unprecedented in that it united the majority of Southeast Alaska's Tlingit *kwaans* against a common foreign enemy. Given the highly decentralized, complex socio-political organization of Tlingit country as well as the very real history of internecine warfare between individual Tlingit clans and villages, the 1802 uprising was a momentous event in Tlingit political history. The effective unification of much of Tlingit country for a common cause is in itself indicative of the radical changes colonialism brought to the Indigenous social landscape. Furthermore, the realities of

⁷³ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 120-23; Schuhmacher, "Aftermath of the Sitka Massacre of 1802," 203-9; Schuhmacher, "Henry Barber, Merchant Captain of the Pacific," 211-16.

Russian and Indigenous captivities within this colonial context were fundamentally interwoven with this process.

Following the devastation wrought at Sitka and the ensuing standoff with Henry Barber, Baranov, among other Russian officials and survivors of the attack, regrouped at Kodiak. The siege of 1802 had extreme material and political consequences for the RAC in the loss of profits, property and personnel. Indeed, between the razing of Sitka and the massacre of the Urbanov party, the RAC lost close to two hundred Russians and “dependent” Native workers. The four thousand pelts and other goods looted from Fort Mikhailovskii were never recovered, a number of captives taken from the fort and from the Urbanov party never returned, and the ransom organized between Barber and Baranov were each blows to the company in their own right. Nevertheless, plans to retake Sitka commenced shortly after the dust settled, though it would be another two years before the RAC again established themselves in Tlingit country. The length of this interlude was determined in part by the multiple setbacks described, but as Ilya Vinkovetsky argues, Baranov and other RAC administrators feared a Native revolt in Kodiak. The conditions imposed by the company on Aleuts and Alutiiqs under its jurisdiction, *kaiur* slavery and debt peonage among them, were arguably harsher than the various Russian depredations against Tlingits, and Baranov had plenty reason to fear a further deterioration of power during this moment of vulnerability. According to this logic, any immediate attempt to reassert a Russian presence at Sitka could have possibly drained scarce resources in such a way that the RAC would be rendered vulnerable to further Indigenous revolts. Such a threat never materialized, however, and in September 1804, the arrival of reinforcements in the form of the sloop *Neva* captained by Yuri

Lisianskii finally allowed Baranov the resources and opportunity to retaliate against the 1802 attackers.⁷⁴

Lisianskii, under whose leadership the *Neva* accomplished one of the first Russian circumnavigations of the earth, provides a highly detailed account of the 1804 Battle of Sitka and subsequent negotiations between the RAC and Tlingit leaders. On September 19, Lisianskii and the *Neva* rendezvoused with Baranov and the crew of the ship *Ermark* near Sitka in the midst of cold, wet squalls and fog. Baranov, who had spent the previous months preparing a force for the recapture of Sitka, brought news that most Tlingit settlements in the area had dispersed and that his crew destroyed and looted a number of villages belonging to the Kake-Kuiu along the way, ostensibly to exact revenge for the massacre of Urbanov's party in what amounted to the first of many acts of violence to accompany the Russian counter-offensive. On September 24, Lisianskii and Baranov's party arrived on Sitka Island, where hundreds of mostly Indigenous employees of the RAC and their families set about erecting tents, cooking, and laughing over fires flickering in the commotion as scores of baidarkas beached. On September 28, Baranov's company began to gradually mobilize for its assault on Sitka as the chants of Tlingit shamans carried across the forests and waters of the sound under nightfall. The following morning, RAC forces approached the main Tlingit settlement, by which time the Tlingits had abandoned in anticipation of the Russian invasion and withdrawn to a fortification known as *Shiksi Noow* ("Sapling Fort"), constructed in 1802 following the destruction of Mikhailovskii. Baranov and a party of armed men scaled a prominent nearby hill known to Tlingits as *Noow Tlein* ("Castle Hill"). There, he raised a flag for the Russian Empire

⁷⁴ Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-43; Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 73-88.

on the site where the new fort of Novo Arkhangel'sk would later stand. From Castle Hill, the RAC began its push against the Sitka Tlingit.⁷⁵

As Baranov's forces began to mobilize from their base at Castle Hill, the Tlingit forces under K'alyaan in turn prepared for a lengthy siege of *Shiksi Noow*. Key to the Tlingit defense strategy was continued access to gunpowder. Indeed, *Shiksi Noow* was equipped with a high palisade topped with falconets and was constructed in such a way as to be highly defensible so long as its occupants had ample stores of gunpowder to power the fort's guns. As the Russian forces encroached, the fort's Sitkan defenders dispatched a large canoe to a cave near Kootznahoo to obtain reserve gunpowder in preparation for the coming siege. On its return voyage, the canoe was sighted, and after a firefight with the crew of the *Neva* under Lisianskii's orders, a stray bullet struck the canoe and triggered an explosion which destroyed the Sitkans' gunpowder reserves. This incident was of critical significance to the defenders. A number of young noblemen representing the houses of Kiks.adi were killed in the blast (three, according to Johnson), some six to seven of the wounded were taken captive (two later died), and the gunpowder supply of *Shiksi Noow* was not replenished in time for the impending Russian siege. Furthermore, four to five surviving captives taken following the explosion were transported to Kodiak, where, under Baranov's direct orders, they were to be employed "just as Aleut workers," that is to say, as *kauiry*. The inadequate supply of gunpowder in the fort would prove to be a key reason for Tlingit defeat in 1804.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Yuri F. Lisianskii, "Eyewitness Account of the Battle of 1802 and Peacemaking of 1805," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Lydia T. Black, 225-47; K.T. Khlebnikov, "The Battle at Indian River, 1804," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, trans. Colin Bearne, 253-55.

⁷⁶ Andrew P. Johnson, "Part Two: The Battle of 1804," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, told in English and recorded by A.P. Johnson, Sitka, between 1974-77, transcribed by Richard Dauenhauer, 257-64; Andrew P. Johnson, "Part Four: The Battle at Indian River, 1804," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, told in English and

On September 30, the Tlingit defenders, realizing the difficulty of their situation, entered into one of a series of negotiations with the Russians, offering a sea otter pelt as a symbol of good will and offering one of their own as a hostage. Baranov demanded that the Tlingits deliver at least two high-ranking hostages as *amanaty* as well as turn over a number of Aleuts and Alutiiqs previously taken captive. The Tlingit representatives refused these terms and negotiations fell apart. On October 1, Lisianskii's forces further encroached upon *Shiksi Noow*, initiating an exchange of fire between the Russians and the Tlingit defenders, and on October 2, Lisianskii attempted to organize another exchange of captives, a demand to which an unnamed Tlingit chief offered his grandson as *amanaty* to ensure that the demand would be met the following day. On October 3, the Sitkans remaining in the fort raised a white flag and sent nine Aleut captives to the Russian side. According to Lisianskii, this number did not amount to the total captives held in the fort, and the *Neva* continued its fire.⁷⁷ As such, the siege of *Shiksi Noow* continued, marked by periodic negotiations between the two sides in which the status of captives assumed a paramount role.

Tlingit oral histories also narrate the siege of *Shiksi Noow* and its accompanying negotiations. In his paper focusing on the Battle of 1804 from the Kiks.adi oral history perspective, Herb Hope states that though the Sitkan defenders were decisively opposed to surrendering (an act which they believed would lead to their enslavement), conditions within the fort grew dire as already scarce supplies of gunpowder ran dry. In order to buy

recorded by A.P. Johnson, 1979, transcribed by Richard Dauenhauer, 265-72; Lisianskii, "Eyewitness Account of the Battle of 1804," 225-47.

⁷⁷ Lisianskii, "Eyewitness Account of the Battle of 1804," 225-47; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 116-43.

time, Kiks.adi leaders offered a truce and exchanged hostages while holding out on a surrender, information which corroborates Lisianskii's account of the bombardment. According to Hope, as the Tlingit defenders and Russians continued to hold sporadic negotiations in which the status of captives on both sides was used as a bargaining chip, the Tlingit leadership in *Shiksi Noow* began to prepare for an evacuation, noting that the fort did not have the resources to sustain a defense and fearing that the fort's inhabitants would be starved out. The evacuation of *Shiksi Noow*'s most vulnerable (including children and the elderly) soon began in earnest in what Tlingit histories now recount as the "Kiks.adi Survival March," the mass migration of Sitkans to the safety of nearby forests and Tlingit villages in which many died. This evacuation apparently came to form part of continued peace negotiations with Russians, as both Lisianskii and Khlebnikov state that from October 4 to 7, an indiscernible number of *amanaty*, including Kodiak Aleuts and Tlingit men, were exchanged until the two parties reached an agreement whereby the Kiks.adi agreed to finalize their vacation of *Shiksi Noow*. Hope recounts that the Kiks.adi arranged a special signal to indicate their readiness to leave as the remaining elders thanked the warriors for defending their home. Those clan members left sang a final song in *Shiksi Noow*, one of grief in the face of defeat at the hands of a terrible enemy before departing, most likely on the 7th. Lisianskii and his men entered the empty fort, where they looted the most valuable goods left behind by the Kiks.adi and set the rest ablaze.⁷⁸ As such, *Shiksi Noow* fell to the invaders and the Tlingit resistance

⁷⁸ Herb Hope, "The Kiks.adi Survival March of 1804," in *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, ed. Thomas F. Thornton, 273-85; Lisianskii, "Eyewitness Account of the Battle of 1804," 225-47.

movement began to disintegrate after a sequence of events in which captivity functioned as a critical tool of negotiation.

After the flight of the Kiks.adi in October 1804, it was not until 1805 that Baranov and the RAC brokered an official (and final) peace with the Tlingit clans of the area. Most of the Kiks.adi in exile took refuge with the Tlingits of Angoon, with whom they possessed extensive marital ties. With the approval of the Angoon, the Kiks.adi, led by K'alyaan, established themselves at an abandoned fort by the name of *Chaatlk'aanoow* within the vicinity of Fort Craven. From this strategic position, they imposed a blockade on the village of Sitka to starve the Russians out. Over the next year, negotiations between Russians, the Kiks.adi, and other rebelling Tlingit clans continued, and the exchange of *amanaty* proved critical to securing peace and the eventual return of the Kiks.adi and other Sitkan exiles. The process included negotiations between individual Tlingit *kwaans* and clans. Lisianskii describes the reception of a prominent Sitkan chief on July 16, 1805, in a lavish ceremony at the new Russian settlement of Novo Arkhangel'sk. After bestowing a requisite gift on the leader, whose eldest son had previously been taken hostage, he agreed to peace terms on the condition that he be allowed to return home with his elder son in exchange for his youngest. Soon after, K'alyaan himself was received by Baranov, and Russian-Tlingit relations transitioned into what Grinev describes as a "cold war."⁷⁹ As such, the Sitka conflict, one characterized by captivity, was likewise ended through captivity.

⁷⁹ Lisianskii, "Eyewitness Account of the Battle of 1804," 225-47; Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 139-41.

Despite Russian reclamation of Sitka, construction of Novo Arkhangelsk in 1804, and the subsequent brokering of peace with the Sitkan rebels, the status quo had not returned. The conflict of 1802-1804 had profound consequences. In burning Fort Mikhailovskii, stripping the compound of its resources, and killing almost 200 Russian and Indigenous employees in the process, K'alyaan and his army dealt a crippling blow to operations in Russian Alaska. In addition to the obvious infliction of financial and human damages, the Battles of Sitka ultimately curtailed Russian prospects for expansion along North America's Pacific Coast. Though they defeated the Tlingit rebels and reestablished a Russian presence at Sitka, Baranov and the RAC had effectively discovered the limits of their ability to consolidate power in the region. The Russian-Tlingit "cold war" described by Andrei Grinev serves as an indication that although the RAC succeeded in reversing the loss of Sitka, diminished resources and the possibility of further conflict with the more numerous Tlingit *kwaans* effectively froze any further extensions of Russian power in Southeast Alaska. Indeed, Russian claim to the region existed more in name than in reality and effective Russian control extended no further than the immediate vicinity of settlements such as Novo Arkhangel'sk. This conundrum was little helped by a similar Tlingit revolt at Yakutat in 1805 that required yet another diversion of resources, and the new order ushered in by the peace at Sitka essentially hobbled the company's ambitions for an American empire. As such, though Baranov was successful in re-asserting an RAC presence in Southeast Alaska, Russian America would enter a period of protracted decline culminating in the colony's sale to the United States in 1867. The Tlingit rebellion, Battles of 1802-4, and the ensuing "cold war" not only

served as turning points in this decline but were closely bound with the practice and peculiarities of captivity in “Russian America.”

Conclusion



K'alyaan and his wife c. 1818.⁸⁰

Only one contemporary image of the Tlingit leader K'alyaan is known to exist. Painted in 1818 by Mikhail Tikhanov, the depiction above conveys a regal essence. The new Russian fort (and colonial capital) of Novo Arkhangelsk, ringed by rugged mountains soaring suddenly from the sea, looms in the background as K'alyaan sternly stares ahead. His face is marked by a carefully-groomed goatee indicative of his high rank in much the same way as the ornate chilkat blanket draped over his shoulders, a luxury item available only to a person of power.

By 1818, nearly sixteen years after the siege of Sitka, the socio-political landscape of Tlingit country had shifted, a change that likewise affected K'alyaan and the Kiks.adi. Following peace negotiations between the RAC and the rebelling Tlingit clans in 1805,

⁸⁰ Mikhail Tikhanov, *Sitka Island toen Katlian with his wife, 1818, Sitka*, ca. 1818, Russian Academy of Arts Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, <https://envisioning-alaska.org/authors/tikhanov-mikhail>.

K'alyaan's political position changed from one of confrontation to wary conciliation. Tikhanov's portrait depicts a silver medallion dangling above K'alyaan's chest, an item bestowed upon the leader by Baranov as a "profession of friendship" and a reward for cooperation with the RAC in the aftermath of the conflict. It would be unfair, however, to describe K'alyaan as a turncoat in the aftermath of the conflict. Beyond the obvious role he played in recalibrating the colonial contest for space in the American North Pacific, K'alyaan exemplified the negotiations Indigenous leaders and groups undertook to navigate and control a violent landscape in transformation. Like other areas of the Pacific Northwest Coast in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Tlingit country and its leaders found itself in the midst of rapid economic, social, and political change instigated by Euro-American colonial activities and the maritime fur trade. Unlike other regions, however, colonialism in Tlingit country was distinguished by the distinctive approach undertaken by Russian agents in the Golikov-Shelikov Company and Russian American Company towards establishing formal presence and control for the Russian Empire. This approach was characterized by the organized, intensive exploitation of largely unfree Aleut and Alutiiq labor for the purpose of gathering profitable sea otter pelts for international markets. The process of consolidating control over the Aleutian and Kodiak Islands was one of intense violence in which captivity practices such as *kaiurstvo* and the use of *amanaty* were central. The subsequent Russian push into Tlingit country under Baranov's leadership further provoked conflict through the extermination of sea otter populations using unfree labor, similar actions which infringed on Tlingit sovereignty, and the imposition of practices which Tlingits perceived as measures to reduce them to slavery, a system with which they themselves were intimately familiar.

When this volatile political landscape erupted into open conflict in 1802, captivity would again shape its aftermath and resolution. There is a peculiar irony that in attempting to “save” the almost thirty individuals (some of whom were *kaiury*) enslaved following the destruction of Fort Mikhailovskii, Henry Barber, himself no stranger to human trafficking, took captive several of the Tlingit captors in order to subsequently ransom the survivors to Baranov. However, the Barber incident effectively demonstrates the varying and central roles played by European and Indigenous captivities in the violent and changing political landscape of the Northwest Coast. Not only could captivity create conflict along with economic change but could be further used to resolve conflicts as evidenced by the centrality of hostages in peace negotiations between Tlingits and the RAC. The use of *amanaty* was further utilized by Russians to maintain that peace in the years following the conflict at Sitka much like in the Aleutians and Kodiaks, though they would never exercise unilateral control in Tlingit country despite re-establishing a presence in Tlingit country and the 1802-4 uprising fundamentally hobbled Russian ambitions for empire on the Pacific Coast of America at a time when British and American agents were successfully expanding their influence. The Sitka conflict of 1802-1804 thus exemplified and was a product of the widespread transformations wrought on the Pacific Northwest Coast by Euro-American colonialisms, processes in which captivity and unfree labor were central, both in the Russian colonial advance and the Tlingit response.

IV. EXTINCTION AND EXPANSION: RAIDERS, CAPTIVES, AND THE RISE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY IN A CHANGING INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE

Introduction



Frank Allen and his wife Lucy, c. 1930.⁸¹

In 1940, a young ethnologist by the name of William Elmendorf received funding from the University of California Berkeley to conduct field research in Washington state. That summer, he conducted a series of interviews with Frank Allen, an elderly Skokomish (Twana) informant. Born in 1858, Allen came of age during an era of rapid and tumultuous change for Indigenous people on the Northwest Coast. By the late nineteenth-century, Euro-American settlement was well underway in what would become Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska, and Native communities, already rattled by

⁸¹ B. Layman, *Skokomish couple Frank (Ni-ach Ca-num) and Lucy (Ash-ka-blu) Allen in ceremonial dress, Washington, ca. 1930*, ca. 1930, General Indian Collection no. 564, University of Washington Libraries.

decades of colonial violence, rapidly found themselves both adapting and struggling to retain their cultures. Frank Allen personally bore witness to this change, but moreover, he inherited a history of the change that preceded him. Himself a member of a prominent family of titleholders, Allen learned the histories of his people as befitted a man of his ancestry. In 1940, he would share a wealth of stories with Elmendorf. Of all the stories Allen told, however, one in particular stood out. According to Allen, sometime in the mid-nineteenth century the Coast Salish peoples of Puget Sound united to make war against the Lekwiltok, a grouping of the southernmost Kwakwaka'wakw peoples, in retribution for decades of violence and slave raiding. As Allen described the situation, "They [Lekwiltoks] took many women and slaves from all the people around here, and at last everybody got tired of those [Lekwiltok] coming and raiding them."⁸²

Frank Allen's narrative is one of many oral histories describing a great war against the Lekwiltok in which the majority Coast Salish peoples and villages united to exact vengeance on a common enemy. In their analysis of this conflict, anthropologists Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay refer to twenty-one Coast Salish accounts (including Frank Allen's), a confrontation which they dub "The Battle of Maple Bay" in reference to the waterway on Vancouver Island where it most likely took place. The battle culminated in a decisive Lekwiltok defeat and was characterized by an unprecedented alliance between autonomous Coast Salish villages. Although it has since faded into relative historical obscurity, the conflict as described by Frank Allen was representative of a

⁸² Frank Allen, "Kitsap's great battle with the Kwakiutl [c. 1845]," in *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, ed. William W. Elmendorf (Seattle, London, & Vancouver: University of Washington Press & UBC Press, 1993), 145-153.

world in violent transformation.⁸³ This transformation involved multiple factors. Among these were the near extermination of the sea otter which contributed to the gradual decline of the maritime fur trade and the eventual shift to a fur trade centered on land. This shift ultimately produced a highly complex, volatile change in Indigenous political economies, of which Lekwiltok violence against Coast Salish communities during the 19th century was a symptom. Another was the growth and metamorphosis of the practice of Indigenous slavery as an essential feature of native social, political, and economic landscapes on the Northwest Coast. The trade in European manufactures that began during the period of the maritime fur trade fundamentally altered existing Native practices, politics, and trade routes, amplifying pre-existing patterns of violence and making slavery more crucial, as well as more profitable, to Indigenous political economies.

This chapter will analyze the economic, political, and social changes that accompanied the transition to the land-based fur trade in two major arenas. The first involved the territorial expansion and increased slave raiding of the Lekwiltok beginning in the 1810s. The scale of Lekwiltok raiding in the Salish Sea as well as the connection of the growing land-based fur trade to an economy of captive ransoming is captured in journals of Fort Langley, built in 1827 by the ascendant Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), as well as in the private diaries of independent fur traders and Native oral histories. Lekwiltok raiding was incentivized by the presence of a complex slave-trading network on the northern Northwest Coast in which the Lekwiltok were the southernmost

⁸³ Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay, "The Battle at Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories," *Ethnohistory* vol. 53, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 359-392.

participants. Lekwiltoks frequently funneled their Coast Salish captives north in exchange for furs or manufactures, indicating the changes brought to Indigenous slavery by the fur trade. The 1830s Battle of Maple Bay reflected these changes, both in its repercussions in the Salish Sea as well as in the unusual political circumstances manifest in this conflict. This represented a watershed moment in the evolution of a new socio-economic landscape as a result of the shift from sea to land.

The second part of this chapter shifts the geography of change further north. At the center of developments on the northern Northwest Coast was the construction of Fort Simpson in 1834, which signaled the rising dominance of the HBC and the land-based fur trade. The fort grew within two years to become the most lucrative HBC post on the Northwest Coast, funneling thousands of furs to Europe and Asia and restructuring Native political and economic networks on the northern coast. Fort Simpson became the nexus of an economy of slave-trading and raiding on the northern coast which generated waves of violence. Crucial to this nexus was the influence of the land-based fur trade on the Indigenous potlatch system. The demand for abundant inland furs led to the emergence of highly wealthy Native middlemen, fueling the prosperity of such groups as the Fort Simpson Tsimshian and the Stikine Tlingit. In order to validate their rank and expand their influence, such middlemen expended their newfound wealth on increasingly lavish and frequent potlatch ceremonies. These displays necessitated the further acquisition of western goods and fueled the demand for captives as items of exchange and symbols of wealth. In this way, the growth of the land-based fur trade was intrinsically connected to the expansion of Indigenous slavery on the northern coast.

In 1846, Great Britain and the United States agreed to partition much of the Northwest Coast south of Russian America (Oregon Country), a decision which ultimately paved the way for increased Euro-American immigration to the region and the emergence of settler-colonial regimes. The 1846 Oregon Treaty would signal yet another transformation of the Northwest Coast, one which saw the disappearance of the fur trade altogether. The fur trade nonetheless functioned, both in its maritime and land-based phases, as the vanguard of Euro-American colonialism on the Northwest Coast. The success of the fur trade, and especially the rise to dominance of the HBC, laid the foundations for the later success of the settler-colonial project. The wealth generated by the fur trade was made possible by the traffic in human bodies and the multiple dislocations it caused to Indigenous societies. The Battle of Maple Bay as recounted by Frank Allen represents a defining moment in the transformation of this traffic and the violence that followed in its wake.

Salish Sea Slave-raiding and the Battle of Maple Bay

By 1810, the decline of sea otter populations throughout the Northwest Coast grew increasingly apparent both to Euro-American maritime traders and to the Native peoples who had benefited the most from the trade. This decline, in addition to eating away at the fortunes of all parties involved, set in motion the transition to a new socioeconomic reality. Once abundant along the Northwest Coast, sea otters had by the first decades of the nineteenth century declined such that the once “monolithic” maritime fur trade increasingly diversified in order to remain profitable. Merchant ships

frequenting the coast turned to the trade in sandalwood from the Hawaiian Islands to bolster their earnings, and the rising trade in fur seals among American and Russian traders led to local declines in fur seal populations throughout the Pacific. Furthermore, though otter skins were traded well into the 1820s and beyond, the total numbers acquired continued to fall. A natural manifestation of this change was the increasing demand for and profitability of fur-bearing land mammals, while the locus of sea otter hunting shifted south to the Californias. Though the Northwest Coast fur trade remained largely maritime into the 1820s, its metamorphosis was accelerated by an additional development: the westward expansion of HBC operations.⁸⁴

As the regional influence of the Russian American Company (RAC) and the Bostonian traders who had previously dominated the sea otter economy diminished in relevance, the HBC extended its reach to the Northwest Coast under the oversight of Sir George Simpson, establishing a string of posts from the Columbia River to the Alaskan panhandle during the 1820s. The HBC had previously been active largely in the North American interior. In 1808, however, HBC man Simon Fraser descended the river that now bears his name, establishing a viable route from the British Columbian interior to the coast. In 1827, HBC expansion began in earnest with the construction of Fort Langley near the mouth of the Fraser River at the Salish Sea, and construction of forts Simpson and McLoughlin followed soon after. The commercial landscape of the Northwest Coast, however, was still largely contested during the late 1820s and early 1830s, with HBC forts still having to compete with American and Russian traders. The decisive moment came in 1839 when the ailing RAC agreed to lease its claimed territories in the Alaskan

⁸⁴ Igler, *The Great Ocean*, 99-129; Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 251-267.

Panhandle to the HBC in exchange for regular provisions to the former's establishments. This enabled the HBC to build posts at the Tlingit villages of Taku and Stikine, and the agreement provided the company with the tools to construct a monopoly over the trade with Native people. This process, though gradual, effectively led to the consolidation of a new fur trade centered on trading posts, fundamentally recalibrating the Indigenous political and economic landscape which arose during the maritime period.⁸⁵

The transformation of the fur trade and the growing influence of the HBC coincided with the emergence of another development: the expansion of the Lekwiltok people and an accompanying spiral in violence. The name "Lekwiltok" refers collectively to a number of groups constituting the southernmost branch of Kwakwa'la speakers (or Kwakwa'wakw).⁸⁶ The Kwakwaka'wakw people traditionally lived in the territory surrounding what are now the Johnstone Straits and adjacent areas on the British Columbia mainland and the east coast of Vancouver Island. In the early nineteenth century, at least seven Lekwiltok tribes are attested to: the Weewiakay, the Weewiakum, the Tlaaluis, the Walitsma, the Hahamatsees, the Kweeha, and the Komenox. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Lekwiltok had overseen a dramatic southward territorial expansion that was unique among Northwest Coast peoples. This aggressive expansion, coming largely at the expense of Coast Salish groups in the Gulf of Georgia and other

⁸⁵ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 24-49; Richard Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains: The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 123-151.

⁸⁶ "Kwakwaka'wakw" is the accepted term for those Indigenous groups speaking Kwakwa'la, a Wakashan language. "Kwakiutl," the term once used for all Kwaka'la speakers in ethnographic literature, refers more specifically to the Kwakwaka'wakws of the Fort Rupert region.

parts of the Salish Sea, earned the Lekwiltok a fearsome reputation among Coast Salish peoples.⁸⁷

The rise of the Lekwiltok as an expansive force is attributable to factors emerging from disruptions generated by the maritime fur trade. One such factor was the introduction of firearms into Indigenous trading networks. Kwakwaka'wakw groups on the east coast of Vancouver Island and in the vicinity of the Johnstone Straits and Gulf of Georgia reportedly obtained firearms by the end of the eighteenth century through trade with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth of western Vancouver Island. At the height of the maritime trade, Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholders, including Maquinna, extended their political networks of trade partners and tributaries, of whom some Kwakwaka'wakws became a part. It is likely that through lucrative connections between Nuu-Chah-Nulths and Kwakwaka'wakws, the Lekwiltok obtained firearms earlier and in higher quantities than their Coast Salish neighbors. Indeed, while the naturalist Archibald Menzies noted the possession of firearms among Kwakwaka'wakws in 1792, very few firearms were in circulation among Coast Salish peoples in the Gulf of Georgia and Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1825, areas that would be hit hard by Lekwiltok raiding. In his account of his childhood and family history, Skagit informant John Fornsby recounts an attack in which a Lekwiltok war party traveled south, attacking a village on Whidbey Island in which Fornsby's grandmother was residing. As told by Fornsby,

The [Lekwiltok] came from way down north... They came with guns. The people on Whidbey Island didn't have guns... My grandma ran up into the woods... They shot

⁸⁷ Robert Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775-1920: A Geographical Analysis and Gazetteer* (Vancouver & Seattle: UBC Press & University of Washington Press, 1999), 223-276.

her... They burned the big houses over at Coupeville and killed a lot of people... The people from up north took some young boys and made slaves out of them.⁸⁸

Fornsby's account, in addition to illustrating the violence that accompanied Lekwiltok slave raiding in the Salish Sea, clearly illustrates the disadvantage at which many Coast Salish peoples found themselves with regards to firearms. As such, the uneven distribution of firearms among Northwest Coast Indigenous groups during the maritime fur trade correlates with Lekwiltok expansion into the Salish Sea.⁸⁹

Much as with firearms, the introduction of European crowd diseases, particularly smallpox, during the period of the maritime fur trade created disruptions which later proved conducive to Lekwiltok expansion. Most Kwakwaka'wakw groups were spared during a number of late-eighteenth century smallpox outbreaks. Coast Salish groups, however, sustained heavy population losses during this same period, including an exceptionally devastating smallpox epidemic which struck the Gulf of Georgia in 1782, possibly spreading from the interior plains and plateaus via the Columbia and Fraser River Valleys. Additionally, a number of Coast Salish groups (particularly those in the Puget Sound region) experienced smallpox epidemics beginning in 1792, possibly as a result of contact during the Vancouver Expedition that year. Further catalyzing demographic decline among the Coast Salish was an 1801 smallpox outbreak which impacted most groups in the Gulf of Georgia and Puget Sound, while a "mortality"

⁸⁸ John Fornsbey, "John Fornsbey: The Personal Document of a Coast Salish Indian," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed. June M. Collins and Marian W. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 299-301.

⁸⁹ Douglas Cole and David Darling, "History of the Early Period," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 7: *The Northwest Coast*, 120-121; Silverman, *Thundersticks*, 155-190; Bill Angelbeck, "Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare, or Coast Salish Pacifism Reconsidered: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Ethnography," in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 260-284.

(likely smallpox) was recorded in the region in 1824-25, shortly before the construction of Fort Langley. As Angelbeck and McLay note, such outbreaks (particularly of smallpox) not only led to depopulation among the Coast Salish, but further triggered a cascade of social breakdowns including the disappearance of entire villages, Coast Salish migrations, and the amalgamation of new refugee communities at a time when Lekwiltoks were largely spared such disruptions. While there is still a large degree of uncertainty as to why Lekwiltok groups expanded as quickly as they did, these factors almost certainly played a role in facilitating such conquests at the expense of Coast Salish peoples. There is, however, still a question as to why Lekwiltoks chose to expand their slaving operations so substantially and to raid increasingly for the sole purpose of obtaining captives.⁹⁰



Songhee war party returning to Fort Victoria after a successful raid c. 1847. Lekwiltok Raiders likely returned home from their excursions in a similar fashion.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Robert Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 21-60; Robert Boyd, “Demographic History, 1774-1874,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7: The Northwest Coast*, 135-148; Angelbeck and McLay, “The Battle of Maple Bay,” 386.

⁹¹ Paul Kane, *The Return of a War Party*, ca. 1849-1856, Ethnology Two Dimensional, Royal Ontario Museum.

Part of this explanation may center on Lekwiltok involvement in a larger slave-trading network that very likely made expeditions against the Coast Salish lucrative. In *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast*, Leland Donald maps out a northern slave-trade network as it likely operated prior to 1845 involving groups such as Kwakwaka'wakws, Tsimshians, Haidas, and Tlingits, further extending northwest to the Chugach as well as inland to Athapaskan peoples. Lekwiltok groups constituted the southernmost participants in this network, and while the network in question was highly complex and multidirectional, the general flow of captives was from south to north. Here the significance of the connection between southern and northern slave raiding activity and captive exchange among Indigenous groups becomes apparent. In the 1829 journal of his travels along the northern coast, the reverend and missionary Jonathan Green reported that slaves held by groups in the region such as Tsimshians obtained their chattel from farther south as "objects of frequent barter." This south-to-north movement of enslaved people is further corroborated by the HBC doctor William Fraser Tolmie, who in 1834 reported intelligence from a Heiltsuk titleholder that Lekwiltoks traded war captives with other Kwakwa'la speakers to their north (principally Kwakiutls and Nawittis), who in turn dispersed these captives to Heiltsuks and other groups along the northern coast. Tolmie further reported having seen Cowichan slaves among the Stikine Tlingit during a visit the previous summer, indicating the sheer distance at which slaves were traded. This report is similar to one by HBC clerk John Dunn in his 1830s account of the Northwest Coast, who states that Heiltsuks purchased slaves from "southern tribes" for resale further north, attaining blankets, guns, furs, and skins in the process. Cowichans were among the Coast Salish groups which sustained frequent Lekwiltok raids, and thus it appears that

many of the captives taken by Lekwiltoks were funneled into this northern network for profit.⁹²

In addition to the development of a northern slave-trading network in which the Lekwiltok were participants, Lekwiltok incursions into Coast Salish territory were likely connected to fundamental changes in the Indigenous potlatch system, a critical shift that will be further explored throughout this chapter. In her pioneering study of Kwakwaka'wakw potlatching and warfare, *Fighting with Property*, anthropologist Helen Codere outlines a significant expansion both in the frequency of Kwakwaka'wakw (including Lekwiltok) potlatches and in the sheer volume of goods distributed following contact with Europeans. Codere, however, asserts that although the expansion of Lekwiltok raiding was exceptional among Kwakwaka'wakws, the overall pattern of this warfare was not economically motivated, but rather conducted in accordance with symbolic prestige. This view has since been challenged, most notably by anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson. Ferguson asserts that Lekwiltok warfare was motivated fundamentally by the need for expanded access to items of trade, particularly woolen blankets, and that this need was a direct product of the fur trade. During the maritime fur trade, Kwakwaka'wakw groups were "marginal" given their geographic location far from the outer coast. With the shift to a land-based fur trade, Kwakwaka'wakw groups like the Lekwiltok were further disadvantaged in that they lacked strategic access to interior fur trade routes, and the primary mechanism by which they overcame this disadvantage was

⁹² Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 142-44; John Dunn, *The Oregon Territory and the British North American Fur Trade, with an Account of the Habits and Customs of the Principal Native Tribes of the Northern Continent* (Philadelphia: G.B. Ziegler & Co., 1845), ; Jonathan Green, *Journal of a Tour on the North West Coast of America in the Year 1829* (New York City: Chas. Fred Heartman, 1915), 41-45; William Fraser Tolmie, *Diaries of William Fraser Tolmie*, ca. 1830-1883, William Fraser Tolmie fonds, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives.

through raiding and the slave trade previously mentioned. Raiding allowed the Lekwiltok to obtain trade goods not only through plunder, but through the highly lucrative trade in captives within the larger slave trading network. Increased raiding coincided with the expansion of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch during the early nineteenth century, resulting in a landscape of fear and violence for Coast Salish peoples.⁹³

The emergence of Lekwiltok expansion and slave raiding, along with its traumatic consequences, is captured with unusual detail in the 1827-30 Fort Langley Journals. Built in 1827 by the HBC on the Fraser River several miles north of its mouth at the Salish Sea, Fort Langley was intended to both open up riverine trade between the coast and the British Columbian interior as well as to establish further land-based fur trade operations with Indigenous peoples. The journals, kept by HBC men George Barnston, James McMillan, and Archibald McDonald, describe slave raiding by Lekwiltoks and other groups in the Salish Sea region with revealing ethnographic detail. Lekwiltoks had been steadily expanding their territory southward beginning at the turn of the nineteenth century, and by 1827, Lekwiltok raids as far south as Puget Sound were a common occurrence, enmity between the Lekwiltok and Coast Salish peoples was well established, and a veritable economy of captive ransom had emerged.⁹⁴

One example of the violent landscape in which the men of Fort Langley found themselves is evident in a series of entries made by Barston in the Summer of 1827. On August 11, a party of Skagits trading at the post reported their intent to recover a number

⁹³ Helen Codere, *Fighting with Property: A Study of Kwakiutl Potlatching and Warfare, 1792-1930* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1950), 89-97; R. Brian Ferguson, "A Reexamination of the Causes of Northwest Coast Warfare," in *Warfare, Culture, and Environment*, ed. R. Brian Ferguson (Orlando: Academic Press Inc., 1984), 267-328.

⁹⁴ Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 123-150.

of women taken captive by the Lekwiltok earlier that summer. The women in question were taken during surprise raids and were of Skagit, Clallam, and Kwantlen origin. Additionally, one of the women was the sister-in-law of Scanawa, a Cowlitz trader who features prominently in the journals. On September 7, Barnston reported that Scanawa had ransomed his sister-in-law for the price of 7 to 8 company blankets along with other “trifling articles.” The ransom was reportedly arranged by the Lekwiltok wife of a local Indian man referred to as “The Doctor.” The very next day, the woman in question was murdered by a local Kwantlen man because the “poor creature had not been equally successful in recovering some women of his own tribe.” Rumors would later circulate that a group of Lekwiltoks intended to attack the fort in retaliation for the murder, a response characteristic of Indigenous conflict in the period. Though the presence of the Lekwiltok woman as a mediator in this exchange demonstrates that not all relations between Lekwiltoks and Coast Salish peoples were violent, this series of events illustrates the nature of Lekwiltok slave raiding and attests to arising patterns of vengeance. Furthermore, these events display features of the captive-exchange economy and its relationship to the fur trade. This trade thrived on the high value placed by many Indigenous groups on the acquisition of HBC blankets, which had come to function as a de facto currency in many parts of the Northwest Coast. The blankets were obtained from company men in exchange for furs. Scanawa’s use of such blankets to recover his captive sister-in-law partially shows the flow of material goods that made the taking of captives lucrative to raiders.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ George Barnston, James McMillan, and Archibald McDonald, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30*, ed. Morag MacLachlan and Wayne Suttles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 36-37.

A similar sequence of events is recounted in the 1828 journal kept by James McMillan. On June 11-12, McMillan reported that a group of Musqueams were retreating up the Fraser River following a Lekwiltok raid in which six men were killed and thirty women and children taken captive. Two months later on August 11, a group of Musqueam families visited the fort and their leader, a man by the name of Shientin, reported an unsuccessful attempt to ransom the thirty captives from the Lekwiltok. Shientin further stated that the women and children were traded by the Lekwiltok to groups further up the coast as slaves and that the Lekwiltok had designs on the fort. Though no Lekwiltok attack on Fort Langley ever materialized, a number of company men did have a rather infamous armed encounter with Lekwiltoks at the mouth of the Fraser River. In 1828-29, there were several false alarms of an impending Lekwiltok attack among the Coast Salish groups camping within the vicinity of the fort. In an 1829 entry, Archibald McDonald commented that “it is impossible to describe their [Coast Salish] alarm at the very name of this formidable foe [the Lekwiltok].” During the several false alarms mentioned, nearby Native people evacuated their women and children into the nearby forest or requested that they be allowed safety within the walls of the fort. The Fort Langley Journals give a strong impression of the violence accompanying Lekwiltok slave raids in the Salish Sea, and likewise the state of terror in which many of the region’s groups lived.⁹⁶

Though the accounts of HBC men convey an impression of Coast Salish passivity and victimization in the face of Lekwiltok attack, the reality of Coast Salish resistance and retaliation complicates this image. The ethnographic record indicates that in the years

⁹⁶ James McMillan, *The Fort Langley Journals*, 65-71.

leading up to the Battle of Maple Bay, a number of retaliatory raids against the Lekwiltok were conducted by Coast Salish groups, and it is likely that these reprisals fueled further Lekwiltok slaves raids in the Salish Sea. Following a Lekwiltok attack at Point Roberts in which four Cowichans and one Snuneymuxw (Nanaimo) were killed, for example, McDonald reported in a September 1830 entry the galvanization of Coast Salish vengeance. A joint expedition of “upwards of 500 men” set north in war canoes to take revenge on the Lekwiltok. This expedition evidently proved a failure, and in October a number of survivors straggled back to their homes. This was not, however, the last Coast Salish expedition for vengeance. As we have seen, sometime in the mid-1830s, an army of Coast Salish men drawn from numerous villages and numbering in the thousands successfully defeated a force of Lekwiltok at what is now Maple Bay on the east coast of Vancouver Island.⁹⁷



Maple Bay (*Hwtl'upnets*), British Columbia, in 2018. Photo taken by the author.

Located between Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island, the small cove of Maple Bay was perhaps a fitting place for the greatest act of Coast Salish resistance

⁹⁷ Ibid.; Angelbeck, “Conceptions of Coast Salish Warfare,” 260-83.

against the Lekwiltok. In the Halkomelem language, Maple Bay is known as *Hwtl'upnets*, or “Deep-Watered Place,” and is a space of great meaning in Coast Salish ontologies. Angelbeck and McLay note that during the prehistoric “Time of Transformation,” *Hwtl'upnets* was a “primordial battleground” between “supernatural and nonhuman beings,” whose entrance was guarded by *Sheshuq'um*, a “malevolent” entity known to spin whirlpools with its tongue, “drowning and devouring” travelers in their canoes before it was defeated and turned to stone. Coast Salish elders from Vancouver Island further relate that Cowichan warriors defeated the lightning snake *Ts'inukw'a'* at Maple Bay, acquiring its spirit power. It was in this mythical landscape that the Coast Salish alliance waged one of the most consequential wars of the fur trade era. Furthermore, as Angelbeck and McLay note, this cultural and mythological landscape possessed immense symbolic importance for the Coast Salish alliance in that the later Battle of Maple Bay represented a continuity with past battles in Coast Salish ontologies, a continuity which is further “echoed” in Coast Salish oral histories of the conflict.⁹⁸

While some details are unclear and there is a degree of overlap between accounts, Angelbeck and McLay assert that there is an exceptional degree of consistency between Coast Salish oral histories of the events at Maple Bay. One such account is that of Frank Allen. Though William Elmendorf estimated that the great battle took place in 1845, Angelbeck and McClay conclude that it may have occurred as early as the 1830s. This seems reasonable, given the scale and devastation of Lekwiltok warfare in the late 1820s. Nevertheless, most key details remain the same despite disagreements over chronology.

⁹⁸ Angelbeck and McLay, “The Battle at Maple Bay,” 360-85.

Allen's account provides the same rationale for action as glimpsed in the Fort Langley Journals. The Skokomish, like many other Coast Salish groups, participated in a multi-group "war council" on Puget Sound, held among the Nisqually in response to the growing crisis of Lekwiltok slave raids. According to Allen, the famed Suquamish chief Kitsap took a leading role in war preparations and Leschi, the Nisqually leader later (erroneously) accused of plotting a "war of extermination" on the whites of Washington Territory, reportedly attended the meeting but declined to participate. Despite such notable abstentions, the anti-Lekwiltok coalition that embarked north included representatives from a majority of Coast Salish groups.⁹⁹

After a month or more of planning, the Coast Salish alliance embarked north in their canoes. The number of persons who were in the party remains unclear, and though it is possible that oral accounts exaggerate the number of warriors present, it appears likely that one thousand or more Coast Salish participated in the attack and that the Lekwiltok (though also numbering in the thousands) were outnumbered. The Coast Salish evidently knew that the Lekwiltok would pass between Salt Spring and Vancouver Islands, and according to Allen, the war party camped in the area of Maple Bay in anticipation of the Lekwiltok. The rising smoke of Lekwiltok campfires was sighted north of Maple Bay and several days and nights passed before the enemy was spotted by scouts positioned near the entrance of the narrows. Coast Salish warriors positioned their canoes out of sight around a bend and arranged a complex series of signals to time their strike, sending a set of canoes filled with women and old men into the middle of the bay as a decoy to draw

⁹⁹ Allen, "Kitsap's great battle with the Kwakiutl," 145-53; Angelbeck and McLay, "The Battle at Maple Bay," 360-85.

the advancing Lekwiltok into an ambush. The exact details of this ambush vary depending on the account, though all describe a situation in which the Lekwiltok were duped and surrounded by the Coast Salish flotilla. Frank Allen's account describes a clamor of bullets and arrows. Scores of canoes were drawn into a melee as Coast Salish warriors stabbed and split Lekwiltok canoes with their spears. Angelbeck and McLay surmise that much of the Lekwiltok flotilla was crippled when Coast Salish warriors positioned on the bluffs above hurled boulders onto the canoes below them, and the bay swirled red with blood when Lekwiltoks were speared as they attempted to swim to shore. Though the exact number of Lekwiltoks killed during the confrontation remains unclear, given the estimated number of warriors present and the sheer destruction evident in oral accounts of the battle, Lekwiltok losses surely numbered in the hundreds. By nightfall, the victorious Coast Salish returned to their camps with Lekwiltok captives and built bonfires out of the wreckage of the canoes of the defeated. What resulted was a decisive defeat for the Lekwiltok that would recalibrate the political landscape of the Salish Sea.¹⁰⁰

The Battle of Maple Bay had significant ramifications for Indigenous diplomacy and relations in the Salish Sea region. Though some oral histories describe further Coast Salish expeditions against Lekwiltok villages, many with the intent to rescue family members enslaved in Lekwiltok raids, the events at Maple Bay appear to represent a turning point at which larger wars between the two parties died down. Furthermore, these same accounts detail a process of diplomacy through which Coast Salish peoples and

¹⁰⁰ Allen, "Kitsap's great battle with the Kwakiutl," 145-153; Angelbeck and McLay, "The Battle at Maple Bay," 360-85.

Lekwiltoks secured a tentative peace. These efforts largely entailed arranged marriages between individual families with the intended goal of establishing kinship and thus reducing the possibility of attack. The Lekwiltok evidently initiated one such peace effort by arranging the marriage of two high-ranked women to the Cowichan warriors “[Lexewalas] and Tthasiyetan.” A Lekwiltok chief from Cape Mudge named Thuth-Luth married a woman related to a leader of the Snuneymuxw of Vancouver Island, and two Snuneymuxw women married Lekwiltoks to “secure for their families immunity from war attacks.” In addition to illustrating the critical role played by Coast Salish and Lekwiltok women in the diplomatic process, such marriages additionally indicate the sophisticated political maneuvering these parties participated in through the use of kinship networks. As Angelbeck and McLay assert, political relations between Coast Salish peoples and the Lekwiltok were “transformed,” ending the era of Lekwiltok expansion into the Salish Sea and creating a new political landscape.¹⁰¹

The political processes instigated by the Battle of Maple Bay are further noteworthy in that they were characterized by a remarkable degree of cooperation between autonomous Coast Salish communities and the creation of a (temporary) Coast Salish confederation. Among Coast Salish groups as well as most Northwest Coast peoples, the winter village represented the highest level of political organization, and the political cooperation necessary to make war typically involved a limited number of households linked by kinship. It was through these kinship networks, however, that the Coast Salish were able to mobilize such a large coalition. By calling upon such networks, the Coast Salish, whose political landscape was markedly heterarchical and decentralized,

¹⁰¹ Angelbeck and McLay, “The Battle at Maple Bay,” 376-77.

were able to organize numerous villages and households from the bottom up, pulling in participants from all over the Salish Sea and even from further inland. The war against the Lekwiltok was likely the first regional coalition of such scale to have been organized in the post-contact period, and thus represents a notable inversion of previous patterns as well as a distinctive turning point in its own right in that the aftermath reshaped patterns of diplomacy and conflict in the Salish Sea region.¹⁰²

As anomalous as the Coast Salish confederation appears at the time of the Battle of Maple Bay, such political organization among Northwest Coast peoples was most likely the outcome of the colonial dislocations previously discussed. The shifting socioeconomic landscape as well as changing Indigenous political economies and the paramount role of captivity produced a violent, volatile context in the form of Lekwiltok expansion and increased slave raiding in the Salish Sea. This context demanded a Coast Salish response to what by 1830 was serious threat to these groups' livelihoods, given the scale, frequency, and intensity of Lekwiltok forays into the Salish Sea. As indicated by the Fort Langley journals as well as Coast Salish oral histories, the destructive impact of Lekwiltok slave raids catalyzed the broad mobilization of autonomous Coast Salish communities, and this unity allowed for Coast Salish victory at Maple Bay and the ensuing political realignment of the region. These changes and their outcome were the product of interactions with Euro-Americans via the fur trade and alterations to Indigenous captivities.

¹⁰² Angelbeck and McLay, "The Battle at Maple Bay," 377-85.

Fort Simpson and Slavery on the North Coast

Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, the northern reaches of the Northwest Coast culture zone emerged as a critical center of the new land-based fur trade order. Groups such as the Haida, Heiltsuk, Kwakiutl (northern Kwakwaka'wakw), and above all, the Tsimshian, emerged as central players in the expansion of HBC activities. Underpinning this shift was the establishment of Fort Simpson. Built initially at the head of the Nass River in 1831, Fort Simpson was re-established further upriver in 1834, deep within Coast Tsimshian territory. Within ten years, the post grew to become the most profitable and highly trafficked HBC center on the Northwest Coast. From its inception, Fort Simpson exhibited rapid growth. In 1841, the post reported returns ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 beaver and otter along with other furs, netting the company £6,000 in gross income of which 3,000 was profit. Furthermore, the fort, built on land gifted to the HBC by the titleholder Legaic, became a center of Coast Tsimshian life and culture in its own right. By 1841, a community of 800 Tsimshians lived outside of the fort's walls and almost 2,400 Coast Tsimshians lived within the fort's orbit. In addition to its resident "home guard" Tsimshian population, Fort Simpson drew in vast numbers of Indigenous people from throughout the north coast to trade. In 1841 alone, the fort attracted almost 14,000 visitors, of whom only 800 were Tsimshians from the area, indicating the sheer scale of its operations. On account of its intense economic activity and exponential

growth, Fort Simpson came to restructure Indigenous economies on the northern Northwest Coast. At the center of this transformation were Indigenous captivities.¹⁰³

In addition to becoming the most important center of commerce for the HBC on the Northwest Coast, Fort Simpson and the Tsimshian community that crystallized around it had by 1835 grown into a “grand mart” of trade in slaves as well as furs. This development is evident in the journal kept by HBC agent John Work during the early decades of the post’s existence. In Work’s journal for the summer of 1835, multiple entries record transactions in slaves within the vicinity of the fort. On August 15, a party of Stikine Tlingit departed Fort Simpson having traded their trove of beaver skins to the local Tsimshian in exchange for a number of slaves. On August 22, a party of local Tsimshians returned to the settlement with beaver skins obtained at Tongass in exchange for “a lot” of slaves, mostly children, indicating that the fort itself was becoming the nexus around which the northern slave-trade network revolved. Exchanges in slaves between the Fort Simpson Tsimshian and the Tlingits of Tongass appear in the documentary record with great frequency. As one of the larger Indigenous settlements within the fort’s orbit, Tongass by 1835 functioned as one of Fort Simpson’s primary provisioners, providing critical foodstuffs and forging a close alliance with the Tsimshian of the fort. Much like the Tongass, Stikine Tlingits, themselves well-positioned as middlemen, were frequent visitors and provisioners to the fort. Likewise, Stikines were one of the main recipients of Tsimshian slaves purchased or captured further south, once again indicating the south-to-north trade in captives as well as the centrality Fort Simpson

¹⁰³ Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 123-32; E. Palmer Patterson, “‘The Indians Stationary Here:’ Continuity and Change in the Origins of the Fort Simpson Tsimshian,” *Anthropologica*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1994): 181-203.

assumed in this network. Many of the furs traded by Stikines at Fort Simpson were obtained via their lucrative middleman position relative to interior Athapaskan peoples. High Stikine demand for captives from further south was the product of intensive trade between themselves and interior Athapaskans whose demand for captives was likely spurred by sustained population loss resulting from disease outbreaks and from whom Stikines obtained the bulk of their furs. This demand is evident in the 1840 travel diary of Sir James Douglas, one of the preeminent HBC men active on the Northwest Coast and later governor of Vancouver Island. After arriving at Stikine, Douglas describes the village as having emptied out, the majority of whose inhabitants had either departed for trade in furs with interior peoples or “gone to Fort Simpson to purchase oil and slaves.” As such, Fort Simpson evolved into a major center for the north coast slave trade and there was a direct correlation between the fort’s profitability and human trafficking.¹⁰⁴

The land-based fur trade stimulated slave raiding and slave trading on account of other factors, namely the ever-increasing Euro-American demand for furs and local declines in the availability of fur-bearing mammals. Much as with the collapse of sea otter populations throughout the coast, areas within the vicinity of various groups resident in the region of the northern Northwest Coast witnessed rapid declines in the availability of beavers, land otters, and other species which could be readily exploited for profit at a time when many communities developed a dependency on the fur trade as their economies shifted towards an emphasis on the procurement of furs for trade and the

¹⁰⁴ Patterson, ““The Indians Stationary Here,”” 181-203; John Work, *The Journal of John Work: January to October, 1835* (Victoria, BC: Archives of British Columbia, 1945), 65-68; Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 142-44; Sir James Douglas, *Private Papers of Sir James Douglas*, ca. 1858-1860, James Douglas family fonds, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives.

social status of titleholders increasingly relied on the continued flow of European goods via the potlatch. Furthermore, increasing Euro-American demand for furs dovetailed with local declines in fur-bearing mammals to produce economic pressures for northern peoples in the context of this dependency. Such pressures arising from fur shortages were resolved through the exploitation of already-existing networks of trade by middlemen for the export of slaves. While coastal areas, hemmed in by the rugged topography of the coast mountains, experienced species declines, lands in the continental interior still possessed fur-bearing mammals in abundance. Coast-to-interior trading routes, which functioned in pre-European times as “grease trails” in the trade in eulachon fish and their oils, were transformed increasingly into conduits for providing north coast groups like the Coast Tsimshian and Tlingits access to the dominant source of furs. The trade in slaves with interior Athapaskans therefore grew into the primary means through which coastal middleman groups procured furs for trade with Europeans, resulting in ever more destructive patterns of slave raiding given the premium placed on captives in the slaving economy and European demand for furs.¹⁰⁵

The increasing violence associated with these patterns was in large part linked to the growing value placed on slaves as objects of trade and markers of social status. One of Work’s entries at Fort Simpson references a “scarcity” of furs in 1838 that resulted in growing “poverty,” prompting north coast groups to grow “fond of property of which slaves constitute the principal part of what they possess.” In 1840, James Douglas visited the fur trade post and Tlingit settlement at Taku, leased from the RAC by the HBC. There

¹⁰⁵ Robert Steven Grumet, “Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities in the Fort Simpson Region of British Columbia, 1788-1862,” *Ethnohistory* vol. 22, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 295-318; Patterson, “The Indians Stationary Here,” 181-203.

he witnessed a considerable traffic in slaves, remarking that “the species of property most highly prized among the natives of [Taku] is that of slaves, which in fact constitutes their measure of wealth.” Douglas further goes on to estimate the value of individual slaves as “18 to 20 skins a head,” noting that most were war captives taken in “predatory excursions” for which profit appeared to be the most likely motive. The high value placed on slaves in the northern coast was attributed at least partially to the value of slave labor, according to Donald. The Stikine titleholder Shakes, for example, possessed a retinue of twenty or more slaves whom he employed in performing subsistence activities and tasks necessary for the maintenance of his household. For titleholders such as Shakes, slave labor likely enabled such individuals to more freely pursue activities that allowed them to maintain their status, namely trading and potlatching. More importantly, as the success of Indigenous economies on the north coast grew increasingly entangled in the fur trade, slave labor could be repurposed for the acquisition, treatment, and transport of furs for trade. As such, the importance placed by titleholders on taking or purchasing captives in the nineteenth century was catalyzed by the fur trade economy and slave populations increased among certain north coast communities as a result.¹⁰⁶

The increasing premium placed on slaves by north coast groups was likewise the product of changes to the Indigenous potlatch system brought about by an influx in valued goods resulting from the fur trade. A highly complex and mature relationship between the potlatch system, captivity, and the land-based fur trade evolved along the northern coast during the 1830s-40s. In order to secure and maintain sociopolitical status

¹⁰⁶ Douglas, *Private Papers of Sir James Douglas*; Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 103-138; Grumet, “Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities,” 295-318; Work, *The Fort Simpson Journals*.

in the shifting fur trade economy, titleholders held more frequent (and more lavish) potlatch ceremonies in which ever larger volumes of trade goods were distributed. Such ceremonies necessitated the continued acquisition of goods, creating a cycle of exchange in which captives were essential. The role of the potlatch in this cycle was vividly displayed in Work's journal as well as in the work of Leland Donald and anthropologist Donald Mitchell. One particular series of events captured in the Fort Simpson Journals illuminates this role. On December 4, 1837, a party of Coast Tsimshian bearing furs and headed by Legaic arrived at Fort Simpson bearing news of a great feast potlatch. The potlatch was hosted by Sebassa, a highly wealthy and influential titleholder from the Tsimshian village of Kitkatla, and on December 14, Legaic and his men had departed for the occasion. Sebassa's potlatch triggered a sequence of events in which captivity was central, as the analyses of Donald and Mitchell demonstrate. In accordance with custom, Legaic pledged to hold a return potlatch for Sebassa and his people, obliging the latter to make preparations for the event. These preparations included a deadly raid on the Nawitti Kwakwaka'wakw in which twenty women were taken captive, including the daughter and wife of a titleholder. According to Work, a group of Stikine Tlingit titleholders departed Fort Simpson after trading on August 18, 1838, for Kitkatla. On August 24, the Stikine party returned to the fort with a number of newly purchased Nawitti slaves, including the daughter previously mentioned and some of her "companions." In October, Sebassa and a party from Kitkatla arrived at the fort with a wealth of furs to exchange for various manufactures. A portion of the furs, notes Work in his journal, were obtained by Sebassa from the Stikine party previously mentioned. Donald describes this series of events as the "best-documented sequence of slave raiding, trading, and feasting" known

in the literature, and indeed, it clearly indicates the symbiotic relationship between Indigenous slavery, the potlatch system, and the land-based fur trade as it evolved during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷



Tsimshian potlatch in the late-nineteenth century. The titleholders are seated in the middle.¹⁰⁸

Slaving activities connected to Fort Simpson continued well into the 1840s. One manifestation of this connection was the centrality of the fort in the northern slave network's ransom economy and its accompanying violence. In August 1842, a Tsimshian chief known as Nislaganoose departed Fort Simpson with his two wives and three others (two men and one woman) to fish for salmon and gather berries at nearby Pearl Harbor inlet. Shortly after arriving, the party was ambushed by a group of Cumshewa Haidas who had been scouting the area for potential slaves. Following the ensuing altercation, one of Nislaganoose's wives along with another woman were taken captive while one of the men was beheaded. What followed was a series of events highlighting the importance

¹⁰⁷ Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 113-116; Donald Mitchell, "Predatory Warfare, Social Status, and the North Pacific Fur Trade," *Ethnology* vol. 23, no. 1 (January 1984): 39-48; Grumet, "Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities," 295-318; Work, *The Fort Simpson Journals*.

¹⁰⁸ W.H. Collison, *Tsimshian chiefs and families posing with goods from potlatch*, ca. 1873-1920, Archdeacon W.H. Collison fonds, Northern BC Archives and Special Collections.

of Fort Simpson to the regional system of captivity on the northern coast. One of the captive wives was released by her captors upon their learning of her Tongass origin, as they had kin relations with the latter. Nislaganoose later learned from a runaway slave that the second wife was being held by Cumshewa Haidas in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii). As reported in Work's journal, the Cumshewa Haidas had been in the area during the wives' disappearance and had a reputation for kidnapping in the vicinity of the fort. In the fort's entry for September 6, Work records that a party of Nislaganoose's Sebassa relations arrived from Kitkatla, trading furs for ammunition before departing for Haida Gwaii the following morning in a war party of upwards of 100 men. Two days later, the party returned with Nislaganoose's kidnapped wife and a store of potatoes plundered from the Haida which they promptly sold to the fort. In this sequence of events, Fort Simpson's role in slaving-related activities is evident in multiple dimensions. Not only was the fort at the center of the northern slave trade, but its immediate vicinity was exploited for kidnappings by various groups, including Haidas. Lacking access to middleman trade routes and limited by their position on the outer coast in the land-based fur trade geography, Haidas likely raided in the vicinity of Fort Simpson during their trading excursions as economic leverage given the value of individual slaves and the lucrative nature of the ransom economy. As John Work reported later in August following the return of Nislaganoose, a party of Kaigani Haidas was "prowling about" in the area looking to kidnap local Tsimshians.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the events chronicled by Work in the Summer of 1842 not only illustrate the general flow of trade goods such as

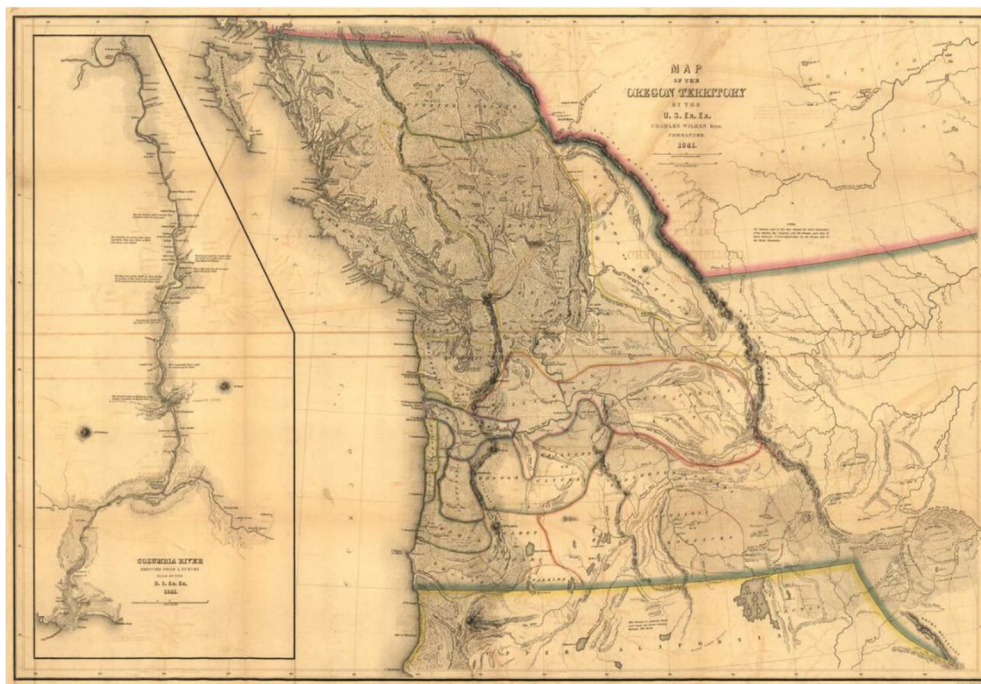
¹⁰⁹ John Work, *Fort Simpson Journals*, ca. 1842, Fort Simpson fonds, Royal British Columbia Museum Archives; Patterson, "'The Indians Stationary Here,'" 196-198.

ammunition and furs, but aid in mapping out the geography of violence and captivity that coalesced around Fort Simpson.

By the 1850s, Fort Simpson began to gradually decline in importance. With the establishment and rapid growth of Fort Victoria, later the provincial capital of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, much of Fort Simpson's trade was lost to the former. As settlement and industrial development in the Salish Sea region accelerated in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many groups from the north coast bypassed Fort Simpson to trade further south and to take advantage of wage labor activities, prompting the emergence of yet another new economic landscape as well as new raiding and slaving patterns. It is important to note, however, that the rise of HBC wealth and monopoly in what would become British Columbia was facilitated by the economies and immense capital generated by Fort Simpson. Indeed, Fort Simpson in its early decades was the linchpin of the new land-based fur trade order, and its rise to prominence was fundamentally linked to Indigenous captivities and an economy of violence on the northern Northwest Coast. In inserting itself at the center of preexisting Indigenous trading and slaving networks, activities at Fort Simpson prompted the transformation of Native political economies, resulting in the expansion of Native slavery in the region. The emergence of Indigenous middlemen and changes to the potlatch system created newer- and more destructive- captive exchange networks. These networks and their accompanying violence made the growth and profitability of Fort Simpson possible, aiding the HBC in its ascendance and laying the groundwork for later colonial ventures.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Grumet, "Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities," 295-318.

Conclusion



Map of Oregon Country, the territory disputed between the United States and Great Britain.¹¹¹

In 1846, the question of legal ownership of Oregon Country was resolved. After decades of nominal “joint occupancy,” the United States and Great Britain formally agreed to split Oregon Country in two between themselves, transferring much of the Northwest Coast south of Russian Alaska to an established colonial power and an emerging one. Though the dividing line placed along the forty-ninth parallel was for years after 1846 little more than an abstraction to the peoples of the Northwest Coast, its creation would signal the end of an era. Shortly after the 1846 agreement, Euro-American settlement on Puget Sound and in the vicinity of Victoria began to gradually intensify, and with it, the power of two hegemonic states. 1846 and the international politics represented by this year ultimately set the stage for the creation of settler-colonial

¹¹¹ Charles Wilkes, *Map of the Oregon Territory*, ca. 1844, Wilkes, Charles Atlas of the narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, 1844, United States Library of Congress.

regimes on the Northwest Coast. By 1900, the autonomy and power of Indigenous communities in the region were compromised. With the coming of miners, farmers, missionaries, and settler states, Native customs came under fire, and Indigenous captivities were among the practices to be gradually extinguished.

It is important to note, however, that the fur trade on the Northwest Coast, particularly in its land-based form, functioned as the vanguard of Euro-American colonialism. The fur trade and the rise of the Hudson's Bay Company created the capital and infrastructure necessary for the eventual settler-colonization of the Northwest Coast. Beginning in the 1840s, fur trade posts in many cases formed the nuclei of future white settlement. This is particularly evident in the evolution of Victoria from the site of an HBC fort to the provincial capital. Furthermore, the mobilization of personnel by the HBC allowed for the creation of colonial knowledges, most notably in cartography and the surveying of resources for future economic endeavors. As we have seen, the entanglement of Indigenous middleman groups in the burgeoning land-based fur trade created economic dependencies, dependencies which were readily exploited by colonial agents and settlers in the late-nineteenth century. Such evolutions, however, were entirely contingent on the success and profitability of the trade in furs. The capital, manpower, and resources imbricated in the land-based fur trade made the later success of Euro-American settlement possible, and all of these factors were ultimately dependent on Indigenous participation, economic, political or otherwise. Bound up in these connections were Indigenous captivities.

The changes wrought on the Indigenous Northwest Coast by the maritime fur trade produced immense political, economic, and demographic dislocations which in turn

created a landscape of violence. With the decline of sea otter populations and the transition to a land-based fur trade, these dislocations were further compounded. The Indigenous institution of slavery played a crucial role in this process and in generating its outcome. Both the Salish Sea region and the northern Northwest Coast were at the center of these dislocations. Lekwiltok expansion, Coast Salish political unification, and the Battle of Maple Bay were the products of changes emerging from the fur trade, as was the rise of Fort Simpson as the nexus of slaving activities on the north coast. Violence, captivity, and colonialism thus triangulated to form forces that not only transformed Indigenous societies on the Northwest Coast, but ultimately produced outcomes that aided the colonizer.

V. CONCLUSION



Peace dance held at a Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch circa 1983.¹¹²

In 1987, the small town of Campbell River on the northeast coast of Vancouver Island hosted a momentous event in the long history of British Columbia's Indigenous people. There, Qwiqwasutinuxw and Nuxalk delegates convened to hold a peace potlatch designed to mend ties between the two peoples almost 130 years after the disastrous Nuxalk raid at Gwayasdums. The potlatch, attended by Agnes Alfred, her son-in-law Chief James Sewid, and numerous representatives from throughout the Northwest Coast, culminated in the signing of a peace treaty between the Nuxalk and Qwiqwasutinux and marked a rapprochement regarding the raid and its outcome.¹¹³ That these two communities oversaw such a profound moment more than a century after the raid at

¹¹² Vickie Jensen, *Peace dance at Kwaxalanukwame* 'Namugwis, Chief William T. Cranmer's potlatch, 1983, ca. 1983, <https://umistapotlatch.ca/potlatch-eng.php>.

¹¹³ Reid and Sewid-Smith, *Paddling to Where I Stand: Agnes Alfred, Qwiqwasutinuxw Noblewoman*, 56.

Gwayasdums speaks volumes to the deep residual scars engendered by the conflict.

Though the Campbell River potlatch stands as distinctive in the twentieth century history of the Indigenous Northwest Coast, it is representative of the lasting consequences of the nineteenth century, its developments, and the legacy of Euro-American colonialism in the region.

The attack at Gwayasdums whose wounds the 1987 peace potlatch sought to mend occurred in a context which evolved over one-hundred years of radical, violent change on the Northwest Coast. Beginning with first encounters and the emergence of the maritime fur trade in 1774, the slave-holding societies of the Northwest Coast experienced economic, social, and political alterations stemming from the material influence of Euro-American colonialisms. The first thirty years of the maritime fur trade witnessed the emergence of powerful Indigenous middlemen on the outer coast such as the Nuu-Chah-Nulth titleholders Maquinna and Wickaninnish, the rise of whom was bolstered by new western goods such as firearms. The ascendance of such figures resulted in waves of “displaced violence” in which slave raiding and the taking of captives functioned as a tool for the consolidation of economic and political power in a new colonial landscape. Furthermore, captivity came to function as an underlying component of Indigenous-Euro-American interactions as well as those between Native communities. Euro-Americans utilized captivity in the form of hostage-taking throughout the maritime fur trade era to leverage their political and economic demands in scenarios in which they had limited power. A particularly destructive aspect of maritime fur trade captivity arose in the form of the forced prostitution and sexual slavery of Indigenous women, a situation in which Euro-American men exploited the presence of slaves and

social hierarchies in Native societies. Much like the “displaced violence” emerging from the trade, sexual slavery produced severe dislocations for Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast in that it accelerated the spread of infectious diseases that spelled calamity for Native people. Though these developments benefited certain Indigenous communities and individuals in the short-term, they ultimately undermined Northwest Coast societies and benefited the colonizers in the long run.

In Alaska, too, the effects of the fur trade and Euro-American colonialism witnessed disruptions to Native life in which captivity played a central role. When the Russian Empire began its southward march into Tlingit Country in 1792, the Shelikhov-Golikov Company and the Russian American Company had constructed a colonial enterprise predicated on the unfree labor of Indigenous people. The captive labor practices enforced on Aleut and Alutiiq peoples for the benefit of Russian fur trade interests created an economic foundation which Russians attempted to graft onto Tlingit Country, producing a volatile situation which ultimately escalated into outright war in 1802-4. Russian America’s systems of unfree labor jeopardized Tlingit economic interests and convinced many Tlingit leaders that the invaders wished to enslave them, and when the 1802-4 Tlingit uprising came, the conflict as well as its various negotiations was fundamentally characterized by captivity. Furthermore, the outcome of the conflict and its processes ultimately weakened the Russian American Company’s ability to expand, altering the imperial landscape of the Northwest Coast in such a way that other colonial players (namely the British Empire and United States) were able to further capitalize on their interests in the region.

With the decline of the maritime fur trade and its metamorphosis into a land-based economy, the Northwest Coast was transformed anew, and captivity was again central to these changes. As the British Hudson's Bay Company began its ascendancy, the changing fur trade economy fostered new waves of violence in the southward expansion of the Lekwiltoks at the expense of Coast Salish peoples. South-to-north slave trading routes and the Indigenous potlatch system were reshaped by the fur trade economy, creating an economic impetus for slaving activities that dovetailed with Lekwiltok expansion. These factors resulted in a geography of violence in the Salish Sea region which culminated in the united Coast Salish offensive against the Lekwiltok at Maple Bay, an event which further changed the Indigenous sociopolitical landscape. Furthermore, such developments in the Salish Sea region were connected to concurrent changes on the northern Northwest Coast emerging from the construction of Fort Simpson in Tsimshian Country. Fort Simpson, which by the 1830s had become the Hudson Bay Company's most important post in the Northwest, enmeshed itself in regional Indigenous economies and evolved into the center of the north coast slaving economy. The land-based fur trade economy created by Fort Simpson recalibrated Indigenous slave-trading and ransoming practices through the transformation of the potlatch system, creating a symbiotic relationship between the fort's profitability and slavery in the region which ultimately provided the Hudson's Bay Company with necessary capital and paved the way for the development of settler-colonial formations in the region.

When the Nuxalk raid at Gwayasdums transpired in the late 1850s, white settler-colonization of the Northwest Coast was well underway following the division of

“Oregon Country” between the United States and Britain in 1846. The formation of settler societies on the Northwest Coast was preceded by decades of political, economic, and social transformations (and dislocations) generated by the maritime and land-based fur trades, processes in which captivity (both Indigenous and Euro-American) were central. When Agnes Alfred’s ancestors awoke to find their village under siege and their people enslaved, the Qwiqwasutinuxw became subjects of violence produced under a colonial context decades in the making. Furthermore, captivity and slavery were fundamental to the making of this context, one which had immense repercussions for the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast. The 1987 peace potlatch at Campbell River was but one symbolic manifestation of this legacy.

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